





The
FLAMING CROSS
OF SANTA MARTA



AT THE SIDE OF DAN RODNEY I FOUND MYSELF WITH MY
FATHER'S BLADE IN MY HAND

The
FLAMING CROSS
OF SANTA MARTA

BY
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CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF DAN RODNEY

IT is with some reluctance that I sit down to write this story—a reluctance that my readers will understand before they have gone very far. It is never very pleasant to relive some scenes through which a man passes—scenes in which treachery and near death seem to be such prominent features on the painting that memory conjures up.

And yet, somehow, I feel that I ought to give this story to the world; indeed, I am compelled to, because otherwise some chapters in the history of mankind would be incomplete without it. At least, so think I who passed through some things that I believe the historian would refuse to accept as truth, but for the fact that he who tells of them is such a man as I am now—a man who holds high office in the service of His Majesty King James I, God bless him! For I, Roger Hampsley, Knight, Lord of the Manor of Potton, by his Majesty's graciousness, am also a master of

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ceremonies at his Court, and a man whose word is worthy of acceptation.

It was not always so; not always, I do mean, that the word that Roger Hampsley spoke would be accepted if it was such things as he told and I am going to write in this book. Truth is a strange creature, the existence of which men oft believe not in unless 'tis vouched for by some one in whom they can trust, despite the appearance of falseness or exaggeration, which is but another word for untruth.

And that is why I, Roger Hampsley, who never before did set quill to paper to write more than infrequent letters to friends, do sit me down now and write the story of my youth; and if, mayhap as it will be, there is much of Roger Hampsley in the story, be assured of this—that 'tis only because 'twas I who passed through the strange experiences recounted, and only I—of that I am sure—who could refashion them for the edification and, I hope, the interest, of those who will read the book. No notes have I, for I was never a man of letters; and there is no need for notes. Every incident of those ferocious years of which I write is impressed into my memory as though it had been burned there by fire—and I, who know, do say that fire could not have burned them deeper than they have been by the hot, searing die of experience.

And so to my story, which begins on a night in December, 1594. 'Twas the Eve of Christmas, I remember. Eighteen I was on the morrow, but the

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day to be held no joy for me. How could it? I was only one of a thousand other boys in the city of Bristol who had neither hope nor future before him.

Three months ago my father had died; my dear mother had gone before him, many years. And when he went 'twas found that, 'stead of a fortune for me, there was naught at all; and I had perforce left the grammar school and come back to Bristol, if haply I might find work somewhere amongst the many friends of my father, Bluff Roger, as they had called him, a man free of his money—too free, so 'twould appear—and mighty well sought after. For what? Just that which he had to give. And not one of those who called themselves friend had aught to offer me except—charity.

The Hampsleys never took charity, and I refused it now. For three months I had lived, though the good Lord knows how. I had carried a man's chest from dock to inn; I had saddled a man's horse; had done a spell of common river man's work, and so had kept soul and body together.

But the blood of Roger Hampsley, who had gone with many a noted captain to the Spanish Main, coursed through my veins, and I liked not the life of a street brat. Fate, so I told myself, held something better than that for me. But what?

Such were my musings as on that Eve of Christmas I stumped down the quayside, afraid neither of the lurking shadows nor of the next man whom I might

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meet. I was a Hampsley, even if my jerkin bore marks of hard toil and lowly effort, and let the cold blast of the winter's night and the soddening snowflakes drive in and chill the body beneath. The soul within was warm, and it answered to the call that came—surely to it—out of the dark noisomeness of an alley that, even in that murk, I recognized as being one of the hell spots of Bristol, a place where sailormen were lured and robbed, and oftentimes murdered that no trace might be found of them or of those who had taken from them the earnings of long voyages into sometimes uncharted seas.

The cry, I say, came muffled through the snow-filled darkness, and I turned, like a hound for the hare, and slipped me into the enfolding darkness of the evil-smelling alley, drawing my cutlass—the one thing I had salved from the ruin of my father and had carried with me ever since—as I ran.

Not far did I run, because within half a dozen yards I stumbled into a struggling mass that I could not see, but of which I could hear the heavy breathing, and knew in my heart I was on the spot whence had come the call.

“Ho, there!” I cried, and I suppose that in my tense excitement my voice had a manly timbre to it, for there was a scurrying of feet, and with much cursing some one went rushing up the alley. “A cowardly knave, whatever his name!” I exclaimed.

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As I spoke a voice seemed to come from the ground beneath me.

"Cowardly indeed," the voice said; "so cowardly that he will, ere many minutes, be back with a pack at his heels. Help me up, whoever you be. We must away!"

Wondering greatly, I stooped and felt for the man who had spoken, found him, thrust back my cutlass, and helped him to his feet.

"Canst walk, sir?" I asked softly. "Or art so badly injured that——"

"Injured, but not so much that 'tis not within me to get from this place," was the reply. "An you lend me your arm——"

"'Tis yours, sir," I said. So, with the stranger leaning heavily upon me, we traced our stumbling footsteps down the alley and so into the snow-filled night that, for all its bitterness, was preferable to the suffocating murk of the alley.

"A safe hiding place, an you know of one," the stranger said quickly.

I, who of sad lot had learned many things, turned to the right and made me for the inn where many times I had spent my last silver coin on a bed and a sup. Old Ben Hatchway, for all his rascality, had been a good friend to me, so good that on this night, when I had been by myself, I had felt that I could strain no farther his hospitality without the wherewithal to pay him. Now, however, with this stranger, thrown as it were

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into my care by a strange Providence, I was willing to do anything, and especially willing to seek the shelter of the Rope's End, because it was the nearest place I knew where sanctuary of a sort could be obtained.

"Whither, friend?" the stranger asked me, and I told him.

"Nay, young man—for I know by the thrill of your voice that you be naught but a youth, though I see you not in this devilish darkness—nay, not there. 'Twas there that villain found me. Young man, an you have not yet tasted it, 'ware o' strong drink. I'll tell you why some other time than now. Now 'tis for us to find a safe place, but 'tis not in the Rope's End we'll find it."

"Sir," I replied, "I know not what 'tis that has happened, but methinks I can guess. Thou'rt a sailor-man, I doubt not, come home with pockets a-jingle, and been preyed upon by some thievish knave who swore you friendship over your cups. I know the sort. Since the Rope's End is not to your liking, then will we try the cellar of the Widow Sawkins, a good, if but poor, friend of mine since the day I dragged her son from the Channel hereabouts."

"Whither you will, then," said the stranger.

We groped our way through the night until we came, heaven knows how, to the unlighted house beneath which lived the Widow Sawkins. I poked my ragged boot through the paper that served instead of glass, and the woman's voice came hoarsely up:

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"Who be it troubles honest folk at this time o' night?"

"'Tis I, Roger Hampsley," I said, and the widow cackled a laugh that sounded of pleasure. "A night's rest and shelter for myself and a—a friend, I seek, though without th' coin to pay," I said.

"Nay, there is coin and 'nough to spare," said the stranger quickly, and before I could muffle his words with my wet, cold hand across his mouth.

"The less you say about coin the better," I said. "The widow is honest, but there be those who're not," I told him, and he chuckled.

A guttering, flickering light was agoing by now in the cellar outside which we stood, and a few moments later the ramshackle door opened and the Widow Sawkins, in a black mobcap that hid the fact she had venerable white hair, and a hideous nightgown of red flannel, stood looking at us.

"Enter you, Roger, and Roger's friend," she cackled, and we went in without a word. "Mind you the stairs; there be holes through which a body might drop an he not know of them," she said, as we followed her when she led the way with the rushlight in her hand.

I do remember that I had difficulty in keeping my friend from falling into those same holes, but at last we were in the evil-smelling hole that served the Widow Sawkins and young Joe, her son of eleven, for a home.

"'Tis welcome you are, Roger," the widow said,

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“though there be but bare boards to lie upon, and that foot of yours has made a draught like a ’Lantic wind; and I with no more flour to make a paste to stick a sheet over it. But if you be as tired as me, never a bit will you mind. Put you out the light when it pleases you to sleep.”

Saying which the old woman, as good-hearted as any who ever lived, laid her down upon the bundle of rags in the farther corner of the room, and went, or feigned to go, to sleep, while my friend the stranger and I squatted on the dirty boards and stared at each other.

“’Tis a good name you carry, young man,” the stranger said to me at last.

“Aye, as good as any Bristol City ever had,” I told him proudly. “But ’tis like to stink in the nostrils ’less the gods do smile upon one who is the last o’ the name!”

“Now I can see your face,” the stranger went on, “by the light of that guttering rush, I do note the resemblance. An you be not son or blood relative of some kind to Bluff Roger Hampsley, then I’m a Dutchman, which heaven forfend! Is’t not so, lad?”

“Aye,” I told him again. “You are no Dutchman!” He laughed at my sally and seemed highly pleased. “But know you—knew you—my father, for Bluff Roger was——”

He pulled me up at that with an exclamation.

“Why say you ‘knew’ and ‘was’?” he demanded.

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"The good God grant that Bluff Roger has not slipped his mooring."

"It has seemed well for the good God to put an end to my father's course," I told him quietly, and—I could not help it, nor felt ashamed because of it—I had a catch in my throat as I spoke.

"Lad," the man said after a moment's silence, and he reached out and took my hand in his, "I'm sorry."

It was said so simply and yet so sincerely that I could not answer him for my emotion. I loosed my hand from his and buried my head in my hands and wept for the sound of the voice that I should hear no more.

The stranger honored my sorrow and remained silent until at last I had recovered; then, when he saw me look up, he said:

"A good man, Bluff Roger, and if I know aught of faces, he has left him a good son. Bend low, lad, I would tell you something."

I looked at him through still moist eyes wonderingly, but bent as he requested me.

"Lad," he whispered softly, "'twas to find Roger Hampsley, your father, that I came hither to Bristol. Hast ever heard him speak of Dan Rodney, who sailed shipmate with him across th' Atlantic?"

"Aye, often, and never a harsh thing had he to say of that same Dan," I told him. "Sir, an you be Dan Rodney, right well pleased is the son of Roger

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Hampsley to meet you, for you were my father's friend in youth!"

"'Tis the same Dan Rodney who speaks to you now, lad," the man said, and he gripped my hand again. He stopped speaking awhile, and his eyes seemed to have a far-away look in them, as though they were seeing things of a distant past. The grip tightened, and I knew that he was living, as men oft do, through scenes that belonged to a dead yesterday. "Did Bluff Roger ever tell you," he started off again, "of that time when he and I, the second time we sailed to far off America, were cast away, two men left of a whole ship's company? Did he ever tell you that?"

"Aye, he told me that," I murmured.

"And of how he and I knocked at the door of the King of Spain on the Golden Main, with a rabble of rebellious negroes behind us, and well-nigh captured Panama itself?"

"Aye, even that," I said. "That and the slave gang to which you were cast when the fight was over and the Dons won. That and the thonged whips, with biting steel in them, that wealed your naked backs. I have seen, Dan Rodney, the scars on my father's back, and for those alone, if naught else, I hate the Dons!"

"Hate the Dons!" breathed Rodney. "An you hate them as I hate them, and as Bluff Roger hated them, then heaven help the Dons!"

"The which heaven does, since it keeps me here in

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Bristol City when I would be carrying a reddened cutlass down the Spanish Main!" I cried.

All my boyish dreams came back to me—dreams that had had their birth in the stories that my dear father had told me when o' nights we sat beside the wood fire and listened to the wind howling outside; dreams that had never come to pass because my father had always said that while he lived no son of his should go into the hell's maw that men called the Spanish Main.

"Bluff Roger himself!" exclaimed Rodney. "So like to him you are, lad! I mind me of that day when he and I, aided by a slave, did slip from the mine gang at Santa Marta, and he vowed that some time he would go back, an heaven spared him, to take full account of the Dons! Nay, listen awhile, lad"—as I was about to speak—"listen awhile, though I doubt not you have had the story time and again. Bluff Roger and I walked, marched, crawled across the Isthmus from the Southern Sea to the Atlantic. We strove to make the coast far away from Maracaibo, but Providence works strangely, lad, and it took us, for its own purposes, to Maracaibo, and there, riding at anchor, our bloodshot, tired eyes saw that which gave them new light and life. Two—

"English ships, 'twas so my father told me," I could not help but say.

"Aye, lad," Dan Rodney said. "With a half-drunk mob o' men aboard 'em, fresh from the sack of Mara-

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caibo. Well, lad, we minded not their drunkenness, but we thought much o' the welcome they gave us in their maudlin. And deep-laden were those ships with the spoils o' the sacking and the ransom for the saving of the city."

"Treasure that was lost ere a month was gone," I told him, remembering what my father had oft recounted. "Aye, 'tis an old story, but a good one!"

"Good indeed," said Rodney. "Good, too, was it when, after a fight with a couple of Spanish men-o'-war, which sunk one of our ships, the other, that on which your father and I sailed, was taken. What, lad, you doubt the goodness o' t? You know naught more than that your father, hurled overboard by a shot that ripped the deck from beneath him, somehow managed to live for a night and a day and a night, until he was picked up and got him back in God's good time to Bristol here!"

"How knew you that?" I demanded wonderingly.

Dan Rodney chuckled grimly, I thought, but he went on with the story that I was now anxious to hear, since 'twas new to me.

"How knew I?" he asked. "The ship was captured, and we men who could not die were sent to the mine gangs—my second spell, mind you, lad. 'Twas while I was there that another Englishman, out of Port Royal in a ship that suffered a like fate to ours, came in his chains, and 'twas from him I learned the story of Bluff Roger. Sam Portface—'twas the man's

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name; his face one side was birthmarked as with the wine of Spain—was aboard the ship that picked up Roger, and when the ships went into Port Royal awhile after, your father, with a chest full of Spanish pieces of eight, his share o' the cruise o' plunder 'long the Main, took him aboard a vessel bound for England, as he'd told me he would. 'An I get my hands upon enough of Spanish gold,' he'd often said, ' 'tis Bristol City for me.'

"And so I knew," went on Rodney, "that England meant Bristol for Bluff Roger Hampsley. Twenty years ago, son—twenty years! 'Tis a long time!"

Dan Rodney dropped into a dreamy state, as though he were again looking back along the vivid past.

"Twenty years!" he said presently. "Twenty years! And now—he's gone. Nay, lad, he's here. He'll never be gone while you are here! D'you hear me, lad? To me you're Roger Hampsley!"

"Aye," I agreed, wondering whether the man's brain was turned by the thump upon the head where the big swelling showed.

"That's it, lad; and I've come those thousands of leagues to find you, Roger. Thousands o' leagues, with a king's ransom in my pocket!"

"S-sh!" I said quickly, turning round, afraid lest Widow Sawkins should be still awake.

She made no sign that she had heard, and there came only the level breathing of her as she lay on her bed of rags.

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"There goes my wagging tongue again," Dan said. "The same tongue that got me into that brawl. But none so bad a tongue, after all, Roger, since it found me you! Bend lower and listen."

I was sitting beside him now, and leaned over so that my ear was almost touching his lips when he spoke again.

"Did Bluff Roger ever tell you how he rescued me in that march across the Isthmus when a tribe o' natives cut me off while I was asleep and he was a-huntin' food? No? A brave man, and a close-tongued one, Bluff Roger was, and never a man to drive the wind through his own trumpet. He followed that tribe for a hundred miles, and one night he crept into the mud hut where I lay bound ready for the roasting—aye, the roasting, I tell you, Roger! Those rascals lost their feast!" He chuckled gleefully as he thought of it. "'Twas Bluff Roger who broke the head of the cook with his only weapon, the iron chain-links that dangled from his wrist, because we'd ne'er been able to get them off. And in the darkness he bit through the thongs that bound me. He got me free, and we passed out into the night and went back the way we had come. That's how Bluff Roger saved Dan Rodney!"

"Never such a story did he tell me," I said, with, I doubt not, flashing eyes.

"'Tis a story a man would ne'er forget," Rodney said. "Twenty years I've had it here," and he placed his roughened hand upon his heart. "And I've come

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back too late for old Roger, but soon enough for young Roger. How old be you, lad?"

"Eighteen, sir," I told him.

"And I was twenty-five in those days," Rodney said. "Your father—let me see, he would be about thirty-five, eh? A father to me he was, and a father I'm going to be to his son, an his son let me!"

He looked up at me with his clean brown eyes, and I knew that I, a waif of Bristol City, had found a friend. He saw my answer in my own eyes, and he nodded, pleased.

"'Twas Will Shakespeare, lad, was't not, who said that there's a destiny that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will? Aye, lad, even sailormen a' times know what the landlubbers write! And this is destiny, lad. What else? That I should come from the Spanish Main after twenty years and find you, the son of the man I sought, so that I might repay him for what he had done for me! A king's ransom, did I say, lad? Nay, 'tis a kingdom's! Art ready to claim it, lad?"

I do confess that, even now, I was bewildered at the man and his rambling tale, and I could but look at him awhile in silence while I tried to grasp his meaning.

"Nay, lad, the rum's out now!" he said with a sheepish grin. "'Twas rum that loosed my tongue in the Rope's End, but that crack about the head drove it out. Here 'neath this shirt o' mine I have the key to a treasure house that——"

He ceased suddenly and sprang to his feet, as I did

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also, for at that moment there had come a splintering of wood, and a snow-smothered figure tumbled in through the smashed window frame. Widow Sawkins screamed as she jumped from her rags, the boy in the other corner yelled with fright, while Dan Rodney made a dart at my cutlass, drew it out and sprang for the man who had entered so unceremoniously. The intruder was on his feet by this time, and the vicious-bladed knife that he held in his hand gleamed in the rushlight's flicker.

He was a big man and bearded, with a white scar that stretched from his right eye down to his chin. He had writ all over him the name of a seafarer. But who he was I knew not until, with a snarl of rage, Dan Rodney, springing for him, said:

“My friend of the Rope’s End.”

That was all that was said between them. But they fought—fought as though they were plowing their way through battle aboard a ship. Round the room they went, and the poor sticks of Widow Sawkins ceased to be of what small value they had been. Rodney, despite the advantage of the cutlass’s length, could not get within the other’s guard, since the latter had, besides his knife, a knobbed stick that methought would spoil the one thing left me by my father. I stood hugging the wall, begrimed and damp, wondering how I might be able to help my new-found friend, seeing that I had neither weapon nor opportunity to break in upon their Titan fight. Widow Sawkins and her boy

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were cringing in the farther corner, both too much afraid by now, methinks, to scream. Not that screaming would matter, since in that alleyway small heed was taken of folks' brawls—there were too many. So 'twas a wordless battle that was fought and a silent audience that watched it, though an I were silent I was wide-eyed and watchful indeed, seeking a chance that seemed would never come.

The scarred-faced man was a real fighter, but—the blood coursed through my veins as I saw it—so was Dan Rodney; and in my mind's eye I could see him and my father standing side by side driving death through ranks of Dons on the Main. I longed to take my father's place.

A crazy chair, caught by a swinging blow from the bearded man's stick—a blow meant for Dan, but eluded with amazing agility—came scattering across the floor, and a leg of it struck me full upon the shin and made me hop. There was strength behind the man's blow, in faith. I stopped me on the instant and had that wood in my hand. I saw me in it a weapon, not much a one, but still a weapon, and I doubted not that I might make use of it.

The bound that friend Dan had made away from the circling stick had brought him nigh unto me, and I, a little confused, raised my chair leg instinctively. I knew that the other fellow would be over too before a moment gone. He was, with a bound that planted him before Dan Rodney, with stick uplifted and—I

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saw it on the instant—his knife held, in a hand that was at the shoulder, ready to be thrown. Dan must have seen it, too, for he ducked as he dodged aside; but I, with a weapon that I could well afford to lose, hurled the leg straight for the ugly face, and caught it full in the thick-lipped mouth where yellow teeth gleamed.

A strong arm and a good throw, which brought a howl from the man and made him drop the knife that might have bit into Dan Rodney or into me.

And then, as his hand went up to the reddening mouth, Dan sprang. My father's cutlass flashed in the weak gleam of Widow Sawkins's light, struck, bit, and the intruder jumped back, knocking over the light as he did so; and I heard the heavy thump of running feet, the crazy door—I knew it only by the sounds—was wholly wrenched from its hinge and fell with a clatter to the floor.

"He goes, the dog!" bellowed Rodney. "With me, lad!"

I knew that my strangely met friend was for following the rascal, whose footsteps I had heard creaking the worn stairs.

"Nay, Dan," I cried. "There lurks danger and——"

"A fig for danger, an I get my sword into that hound's hide," roared my companion, and I knew that it was useless for me to argue. So I followed him as

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he went into the night of snow, only, as I did anticipate, to see no signs of our assailant.

No signs, have I written? Nay, there were signs—of footprints in the snow, but they led, as we found when we followed them, into the main port thoroughfare, and were swallowed up in many another.

“What now, lad?” growled Dan Rodney, and I knew not what to say, except:

“’Tis for you, Dan, to plan. There is Widow Sawkins’s, and——”

“Not there, lad, not there,” the sea dog muttered. “An that rogue still be set on that which he has begun, the Widow Sawkins will have him as visitor again, and maybe with his scurvy friends. Therefore can we not go back.”

“Therefore, so’t seems to me,” I told him, “should we go back, and not leave that poor woman defenseless in her broken home.”

“Nay, lad, the worthy woman will not come to harm. That rogue seeks not her, but me—me and that which I have. As for her home, ere I do leave Bristol City she shall have such a home as she has not seen these many years. Whither go we, then?”

Now I do say that I was hard put to it to suggest. I forgot that Rodney had spoken of money, and ’twas not until he said: “A good bed, for good money,” that I remembered.

“Then will we to the Flaming Cross,” I said. “And——”

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"Hist, you fool!" came Rodney's voice, to my astonishment, and he grasped me by the shoulder. "Say not those words!"

"An a man may not speak of an inn which shelters sailormen," I said, "'tis a strange thing! What is't you mean?"

"Forgive me, lad," Rodney said. "Nerves like a frayed rope's end, methinks I have. Yet lead me, an you know the way, to this place of which you speak. 'Tis passing strange!"

"This way," I said, and dived into a noisome alley. "What's passing strange?"

"This and that and many things," was the amazing reply of this most amazing man, who could fight like a tiger for courage and yet act like a babe at the mention of an inn's name. "You did take me off my guard. I thought 'twas not of an inn that you did speak, but of—of something else. And't has been spoken of once too much to-night, since 'twas those words that I myself did speak in the Rope's End that dropped me into this kettle of fish—shark fish, too, an I know the breed."

All of which was so much Dutch to me, I can assure you. But although I did try to press him, he refused to say more, except:

"The tale can bide awhile, though you shall hear it, since 'twas to tell it to your father that I came all the way to Bristol City."

And I knew right then that Dan Rodney had some-

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thing of import to tell; but I little guessed of what import it would be, and of the way in which that he was to tell was to fashion for me my life, and, as you shall learn, if you be patient with a none too skillful spinner of yarns, to mold the fate of nations.

CHAPTER II

RODNEY TELLS HIS STORY

I'FAITH, I was filled with wondering as I led Dan Rodney through the darkness to the Flaming Cross tavern, kept by a man for whom at times, in my poverty and want, I had done odd jobs, and who even now owed me small silver: 'twas his way—I knew my rogue Wily Williams o' the Flaming Cross—to keep folk, certain folk, waiting, knowing that they would come his way again, and he be able to make use of them. Sailormen there were like that in his power, and oft did Williams find vermin to do ill work, for others, amongst those who thought them his bond-servants because he owed them money. Not so I, Roger Hampsley. I owed allegiance to none, except the Good Queen Bess, heaven bless her. Natheless, I was now willing to go hence to the Flaming Cross and claim a night's lodging 'stead of silver.

So it was with, as I say, great wondering in me at the strange things said by Dan Rodney that I went to the tavern. Not flaming then, 'tis true, naught but a rushlight throwing out a fitful gleam into the night when we reached it.

“As you value your life, Dan Rodney,” I whispered

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to my companion, "you will keep still that tongue of yours, and it does seem to me 'twill be best to be incurious about the name of this tavern!"

"Aye, you're right, lad!" Dan agreed. "Do you lead in!"

So I led him in; and Wily Williams, squint of eye, bearded, and dirty-faced where you could see him, leered at us scornfully as we entered.

"So, young bantling," he said, "you come to spend the money ye have not got on ale? Ha-ha!"

He laughed, as well he might, at his feeble joke, for he knew that never a drop of ale would I take.

"Nay, Master Williams," I said, civil-like, since 'twere best in such a place as the Flaming Cross to be civil to all men. "Nay, not so. I come to ask bed room for myself and—and my friend." I nodded at Dan Rodney, and Williams glared at him through bloodshot eyes.

"Money, me lad, money?" he demanded of me.

I caught just in time the look in Dan's eyes. I realized that he was about to burst out with something about money and sufficient to buy bed room. Maybe, Dan might have sworn he could buy the Flaming Cross itself! But Rodney knew what I meant, and kept a still tongue.

"You do owe me, sir," I said, "sufficient for two beds this night," and I laughed a little as I said it. "'Tis too cold to sleep out there." I jerked my thumb towards the snow-night.

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"He must be a poor sailorman who can't pay for his own bed!" said Williams craftily, looking straight at Rodney, who, I saw, had difficulty in restraining himself. "But, 'a well, 'tis fair dues you do suggest, and though there be but one bed, and that not the sweetest Christian ever slept in, 'tis yours atween ye!"

"Thanks!" I said. "We'll have it now!"

"A rare good hurry ye do be in, the pair of you," Williams told me. "Never to stay drink a jug. 'Tis like men who'd plot ye be!"

Again he laughed. And the half-drunken men sitting around the smoke-filled room—for I'll have you know that although tobacco was not long come to England, 'twas used a-much, mostly by sailormen from across the seas—looked up and grinned.

"A right proper plotter that boy 'ud make," said one of them, and laughed loudly, in which I joined. 'Twas safer to humor them so. "Drink o' the mug, lad!" I refused, civilly, and he held it out to Dan Rodney, who drank deep—and apologized for having done so and having naught wherewith to replenish it.

"Tush, mate," said the drinker, "'tis nothing. In faith, 'twere raw goings if one sailorman can't gi' a sip to another! Out of a ship, mate?"

"Aye," Dan told him gruffly. "This many a day!"

"Then ye be the sort o' man I be looking for!" the other said, getting unsteadily upon his feet. "There's a ship in th' harbor now waiting for men. An you will come——"

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"Whither goes it?" Dan asked, more, I took it, to humor him than for any real curiosity.

"Still tongues, they say, be wise!" was the reply; and the man glanced around the room shiftily, as if he would see who might be listening unduly.

He stooped over towards Dan and, leaning heavily on his shoulder, said, in a whisper that I for one did not hear, something that made Dan start.

"Wilt come aboard, mate?" the man said then aloud, and I saw Dan shake his head. But also from where I was I saw him do something else—he winked at the sailor, who, shrugging his shoulders, slouched away and dropped back on to the rough-hewn bench.

"Ye be no seeker after work, mate," he said, growling—and then Williams beckoned me. He had been out of the room serving another noisy customer, at whose voice I had seen Dan Rodney jerk himself up.

"To bed, lad!" Rodney said quickly.

I followed, with Dan behind me, the landlord out of the farther door, and up creaking, well-worn stairs that led us to an attic in which Dan scarcely could stand erect without cracking his skull on the sloping ceil.

Williams stuck a guttering light in a flagon-top, kicked the filthy-looking bed and leered at us.

"A good night's rest t'ye. 'Tis the best I can do for a small silver coin!"

"Good night—and thankee," Dan replied. And I

wondered at him as I saw him, after the landlord had gone, examine carefully the door.

“No key—no lock at all,” he whispered, coming back to me. “And we do need a key this night, lad!”

“Why—what——” I began, but he clapped a hand over my mouth.

“Bear a hand, lad,” he muttered. “Those boxes,” and he pointed to what I took to be sea chests stacked at one corner of the attic. “We’ll make our own lock, but ’tis careful and quiet we’ll have to be. Bear a hand!”

Wondering still, but knowing that Rodney was not of the make of a man to be over-cautious without cause, I crept after him towards the chests, and together we lifted one from its pile.

“’Tis mighty heavy!” he growled. “But—gently, Roger, and we can do it!”

We did it. Indeed, we shifted no fewer than four of those great chests, laden with goodness knows what, to the door and piled them one on top of t’other, and I’ll wager me that none beneath stairs could have heard us as we did so.

“And that’s that, lad!” Dan said when it was done; and the look in my eyes asked the question on the tip of my tongue. “I like not th’ look of that friend the landlord,” he told me smilingly. “And, lad, besides that, there’s another I like less in this house, and——”

“The sailorman?” I whispered, but he shook his

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head; and on the instant the recollection came to me. "The noisy braggart who came just now?" I asked.

"The very one!" Dan told me. "Lad, 'tis that same rascal who clapped me 'cross th' head and who came to Widow Sawkins's! I caught a sight o' him—maybe he did o' me. 'Twere well to find a way by which to leave, 'cept the door, an it should be wise to go."

He moved across the attic to the window that was in the ceiling, a rough affair which pushed up, and would, as I could see, give a man even of Dan's girth space to scramble through, an he could haul himself up. Dan pushed the half-glazed frame upwards, but 'twould not stay—could not, since there was naught to hold it. Then he went over to the chests in the corner and beckoned me to his side. Together we lifted another chest and placed it 'neath the window.

"And that's that!" he said again when it was over. "And now, lad, I don't know whether you be tired, but I'm not—and I do mean to keep awake to watch and listen!"

"Dan Rodney," I said quietly, "I know not what 'tis all about—leastwise, I know but little—but whatever it is, I'm in. We're shipmates, as I'll have you know, and if there be watch to keep I'm taking my share. So there!"

"So ye shall, lad," Dan said as quietly. "So ye shall, but ye'll have first sleep. So there!" He grinned as he repeated my words of determination. "But ere

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you sleep, lad, I'll be tellin' ye somethin', an ye can keep awake awhile."

"Say on, Dan," I told him. "But 'twere well to remember I know naught o' whether these cracked walls have ears."

For answer Dan Rodney blew out the light, but I felt him as he sat him down beside me where I had lain—not on the bed, mind you; a sight of it had been enough to make a man never want to sleep in bed again!

Then he leaned over me, and for five minutes or more was whispering in my ear. And this is what he told me, as far as I can remember it across the years—the years in which so many things have happened that if those folk who write the stories of nations and kings and wars should say that in some things I am wrong, then I do say that in the real things I am right, and that the little things that are wrong do not matter.

"Already have I told you something," Dan began. "How that I've roved the seas and played soldier and slave on the Main with your father, God rest his soul. But there be other things a-plenty! Once, 'twas after your father did leave the Main to become again a city dweller, I did join me with a band of men under one Hal Cousins, who with several more did get stranded nigh San Juan when Master Drake——"

"The great Drake—El Dragon?" I whispered eagerly, for I knew the tale of Hawkins and Drake, which last was dubbed the Dragon by the Dons. I minded how they had been dealt treacherously with by

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the Spaniards at San Juan Ulloa and well-nigh brought to the last harbor of all. "The Great Drake?"

"Aye, that same, Roger!" Dan told me, and I heard the sharp intake of his breath. "But listen, lad, to th' end. Cousins was also a great man, though naught with Drake but a hand afore the mast. Yet, left stranded on the Main with that handful o' men, he marched a-many a league along the coast, eluding capture, and by the grace of heaven he did make friends with enemies of the Dons—thick-lipped slaves from Africa, who had fled from the mines. With them were white men—Englishmen, to wit, mind ye, lad, who too had 'scaped from captivity worse than death itself. All this I learned me afterwards.

"How came I there? 'Twas thus: I had been galley slave in a Spanish ship which caught an English vessel setting into the river mouth where the one-time slaves were camped. That same ship was laden with much treasure lifted from Spanish holds, and was for careening ere setting course for home. Hidden amongst the trees along the coast the slaves saw the fight—a bonny fight 'twas, too, lad, in which two well-matched ships battled all too well, so that not more than half an hour after the English vessel had gone sky-high, from a red-hot ball in her powder, the Spaniard, holed below water, plunged to her grave. Of the fight, lad, I'll tell ye not now, nor of the horror of those of us who were slaves aboard the Don, neither of the sorry plight we were in, chained as we were when the

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ship went down. Nor can I tell ye how 'twas I got ashore with a chain-end dangling at an ankle. I must have been flung up by the sea, senseless, for when I came to 'twas to see black men and white dancing, like the devils they were in that moment, about dead men pierced with arrows and tied to trees. Spaniards they were, these last, saved, like myself, from the sea but paying the price of the slavery of their enemies. Pity? Nay, lad, there was no pity in me that day. Had I not suffered much at the hands of these same Spaniards? Bah!"

Dan stopped awhile, as though he were watching again the scene which he was describing, and I do confess I shuddered, for I had heard many things many times from my own father of what had happened out on the Main, where, side by side with courage and wealth, vile deeds were done by men of all races, as though the air held poison that tainted honest, noble blood so that men became brutes.

Presently Rodney went on again, and I, all too eager to hear, crouched myself close to him there in the darkness, while the wind outside ever and anon lifted the ceil window and let it down again with a crash that showered us with powdering snow.

"Much there is that might be told, lad," he said, "but why the need? Except this: that from the Spanish ship there were cast up during the days that followed, powder casks and muskets and provisions—also, Roger, a ship's gun. The sight of these things

seemed to please the white men, who, when they discovered me for an Englishman, had welcomed me and done all they could for my comfort. I knew the reason for their pleasure a little later. Twenty whites there were besides myself; and one day they held them a council of war, and this is what happened. Lots were cast for a leader, and Hal Cousins was voted in. Then they talked o' plans that set me gaping at them. They, with full a hundred black slaves, intended to march inland and sack no less a place than Santa Marta, in whose church was the Flaming Cross of which the whole Main spoke with bated breath, for was it not given by the Spanish king himself and blessed by the Pope, and did not the tale go—though, lad, I had not then, nor have I now, any more than th' rest of those white men, any little faith in it!—that on the Flaming Cross hung the destiny of Spain herself? If the Cross be lost to Spain, so should Spain's might depart!"

"Old wives' tales!" I whispered, and Rodney, hearing me, said:

"So I say, lad, but not so the Dons—a man has but to give a piece of wood the blessing o' the Church, and it becomes potent of good and powerful above the understanding of man! Out there on the Main, at least, 'twas believed by the Dons, and Hal Cousins did tell that Drake himself had meant to have it, but had failed.

"'But we'll have it, men!' Cousins had shouted at that council on the river bank, and shook a fist at the

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dead men tied to trees. 'Tosh for their fairy tale, but 'tis a prize worth th' getting for itself. And, besides, Santa Marta's treasure house holds a-plenty for us, an we be bold enow! Those muskets, that powder, that cannon—i' faith they be sent for our use!

" 'Much good be a cannon without shot,' I ventured to say, and Cousins laughed aloud at me.

" 'There be other things than iron balls that a cannon can fire,' he said. 'There be enough metal from the Dons' ships to serve. Listen, men: ye have appointed me your captain. Will ye follow me to Santa Marta?'

"And they swore, lad," Dan Rodney told me hoarsely, "that they would. And, Roger, that same they did—and with them went the black slaves and me. Another time, when th' hours hang on our hands, I'll tell the full story to you, but now, just this—we reached Santa Marta and were fortunate enough to find the soldiers gone otherwheres. We sacked Santa Marta for full three days, and things were done that I'll never tell ye, Roger—vile things and wretched. And when we left, with the Flaming Cross, and mules laden with gold and silver, we were flushed with drink and victory."

Rodney ceased speaking again, and I waited impatiently for him to continue, which he did at last—and it was a different tale he had to tell.

"Roger," he said, "we set course for the coast again, with intent to make a port, and, lurking, bide our time to seize an unmanned vessel. Mad plan? Nay, lad, it has been done afore and will be many a time yet!

But we did it not that time. We were but a day's march from Santa Marta when our first night's camp was attacked by horse-riding Dons. Fortunately we had taken up a strong position, and so held them apart for a while. Yet we knew what was the end. We were on the side of a ridge, which we would cross in the morning. For the night we watched, firing down, afraid to go on because our mule train was too large to tend in the darkness with foes at our heels. Nor did we relish going on without that which we had risked so much to get.

"Came a lull," Dan went on, "during which we held a council. It was decided that half a dozen of the mules, laden with precious stones and gold and the Flaming Cross—the greatest trophy of all—should essay to climb the ridge, and those of us chosen—six of us in all, and I among them, Roger—should find us a place in which to hide the treasure. Fools that men are, Roger! With little chance of escape—for leagues separated us from the coast, our goal!—we were yet bent on laying up treasure, like a thieving jackdaw! Natheless, we were foolish, yet this was done. And, Roger, true to our plighted word we—I and the five men with me—having found the place and in the light of the moon hidden our treasure, returned to those our friends who had sent us. By the light of the moon, too, Roger, I, who was leader of the little band, made us a map. It was for Cousins, our captain,

or for whoever should be voted captain if he were killed."

Again Dan Rodney stopped speaking, and again I waited breathlessly.

"He was killed, lad," he went on again after a while. "So were most other of us. Nine white men only lived by the next moon, and less than half the blacks. For, with the coming of morning, we found that there were hundreds of Dons—not only down below, but also above us. We fought, lad, how we fought! But the end came, and I, Dan Rodney, was once again prisoner o' the Dons, and held so for many a year, and——"

"The map, Dan, the map?" I queried in a hoarse whisper.

"Cousins saw it not, for he was dead ere I got me back to camp," was the reply. "And there was no captain amongst us, so I just kept it, as I must have done, and shall till the end. See, lad, I'll show it you, for came I not across half the world to find your father that he might know its meaning, and found I not you in his stead?"

"Aye, Dan, that same ye did!" I muttered. "Is't safe to show th' paper here? 'Twill mean a light, and——"

"Paper?" Dan's voice was like that of a croaking frog, and I peered at him in the darkness, wondering if the man had suddenly gone mad. "Paper? 'Tis on no paper, that map!" he said, and I heard him fum-

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bling with a tinder box. "The candle, Roger—where is it?"

I twined my fingers round the bottle and pushed it across the filthy floor towards him. The next instant there was a sudden flash, and the drooping wick caught the flame.

With eyes not yet accustomed to the light I peered at Dan and saw his fingers, which I remember even now were trembling not a little, fumbling with his jerkin and then open his shirts.

And something else I saw—something that made me gape and exclaim:

"The map—Dan—the map!"

"Aye, the map, lad!" he breathed exultingly. "Cut into the flesh and rubbed, while the blood yet ran, with the juice of the dye-tree!"

I crave you, you who read this my story, to believe that never was youth more staggered than I; never did man's heart leap more to wonder than mine did when I saw, blue-traced on Dan Rodney's chest, a crude sketching, in the center of which was a cross on which his finger rested as he said:

"'Twas there, Roger, that we buried the Flaming Cross and——"

He stopped suddenly, or if he did not stop speaking, then I did not hear his voice, for there came a roar which I knew even in that tense moment was that of a pistol. Dan's hand, which had been pointing to the cross, fell away with a blood-red stream flowing from

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it; his chest was still bare, but my eyes were no longer looking at it. They had shifted with lightning speed towards the ceiling window, and there I saw an evil, bearded face framed through one of the unglazed panes, while through another was a hand holding a pointing pistol!

Next instant I saw it not, for, with an oath, Dan Rodney smacked his injured hand down upon the candle, and I heard the bottle roll along the floor.

The smell of powder was in my nostrils as I sprang to my feet; the sound as of a body sliding on the roof in my ears.

"The same rascal who—" I began, but Dan Rodney cut me short.

"The same! But there's no time for speech!" he said. "Haul down those chests—'tis that way we will go. He'll be lurking outside an we take the window. Devil take him for this shot hand!"

What agonies Rodney suffered as he and I together lifted down again the chests we had so carefully piled up, I do not know; but I could judge a little from the revilings he occasionally poured out, and the little gasps as of pain. But we got the last chest shifted in due time, and swung open the door. Quietly we had worked, if quickly, lest we should awaken any in the house—fools as we were, indeed, in forgetting that that shot from the window must have been heard all over, as the instant we set foot outside the door we realized, for down below stairs was a light, and up

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from there came the voices of men and the tread of feet on creaking steps.

My hand gripped my father's cutlass and pulled it from its sheath. I heard Dan Rodney's panting breath, and then his voice in my ear :

"An I die, lad, and you do live, copy you the map and go see—Drake himself with it!"

I had no time to think what I thought afterwards—that if Dan died, so too might I, or, if I lived, little chance would I have of making copy of the map, since the hand that struck him down would no doubt be that of the man who sought the map! For the time being I was filled with other things—thoughts of what was to happen now in that moment.

The answer to those questioning thoughts came all too soon. We watched, Dan Rodney and I, the ascending light and saw it take the twisting turns of the crazy staircase. And then, with our backs to the wall, saw its flickering flame on the landing below us. It was a candle, guttering in the draught, held by Wily Williams, behind whom were three evil-faced men. And even as we saw them we heard the thud of a falling something in the room behind us—the room that we had just left.

Rodney swung round, and I saw his gleaming pistol thrust forward, saw the door open slightly; then there came a crack, and something whistled past my ears and buried itself in the wall. I knew then that it was not Dan's pistol that had spoken, but one from below. But

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Dan's spoke next instant as the door swung open wider—and the fingers that curled round its edge flashed away, a howl of pain followed, and next moment Dan shouted:

"Down the stairs, lad!" and was gone, leaping as, even in that moment, I could vision him leaping from an English deck on to a Dons' ship in the thick of a smoking battle.

Down after him I went, gripping my cutlass, and before us as we went the four men below scattered, the candle falling to the floor. Why, I do not know, but I stepped me carefully across the candle so not to put out its guttering light as I followed Dan, who, with an empty pistol butt, thumped the first head he met, which happened to be that of Wily Williams. I stopped not to think that this same Williams had been friend to me in the past; sufficient was it that here he was evidently leagued against a better friend—and friend of my dead father, too. Williams dropped with a cry, and I snatched up the pistol that his nerveless fingers loosed, by which time Dan was halfway down the next flight and a man had turned and was pulling his own lock.

Now I would have you know that oftentimes my father had tutored me in the ways of arms of many kinds, not least the pistol, so that I was not only a good marksman but a quick one; and, not knowing nor looking to see if that pistol which I held was ready and primed, I thrust it forward and pulled, even as I sprang to the

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stairs. Through the smoke I saw my foe go staggering back with outflung arms, and as he tumbled down the stairs he overset the man behind him, who, in his turn, did send heavily to the bottom his other comrade in roguery.

And then Dan was at the bottom too, with me scarcely three steps behind him, and behind me a great light flaming. One glance showed me what had happened. The candle which I had been so careful not to kill had set fire to something, and the tindery wood and filthy hangings had caught light. Even as I understood this there came the clatter of voices at the same time that pounding feet sounded on the stairs above. Dan it was who took in the meaning first; and Dan it was who, having picked up the pistols of the fallen men at his feet and found the one that was loaded, fired; so that he who had thrice attacked him in one night, and was even then aiming as he stood on our side of the fire, crumpled up and toppled headlong.

“Out, lad!” Dan Rodney cried.

We burst like a storm towards the door, with voices of women screaming behind us. We stayed not to see what women these were, nor to see who might be the men whose voices we also heard mingled with theirs. The great iron key was in the lock, and I turned it even as Rodney swung over the wooden bar that gave added security. Then the door was open and we were squelching through the inches-thick snow and battling against a howling wind that drove the ice-cold flakes

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into our faces. And I remember thinking that Dan Rodney had even yet his chest bared—the chest on which was cut the map that told where the Flaming Cross of Santa Marta, and much treasure else, were hidden in the far off Spanish Main.

“Give me the lead, Dan!” I cried above the wind, as I pushed up towards him.

“Take it, lad!” he said, half turning. Then, “That devil’s trap is consuming in its own fire!” he said; and glancing behind me I saw the red glare that I knew was the token of the fire at the tavern.

“Heaven save those—” I began, but Rodney’s hoarse voice cut me short with:

“Pray heaven it doesn’t! Mayhap we’ve done the work ourselves!”

No more did we speak for a long time, during which I threaded my way, with Dan at my side, as best I could through vile alleys, cudgeling my brain to know whither to go. It was Dan who found his tongue first, and the answer to my problem.

We were walking now, since we were far enough away from the blazing inn, though we could see the ruddy glare above the housetops.

“That sailorman, Roger,” Dan said suddenly. “He who did whisper in mine ear.”

“What of him?” I asked, through my chattering teeth. “I saw him not just now.”

“Nor I,” Dan told me. “Know you what he said to me? Nay, of course not, since I did not tell you.

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This it was, Roger—that the ship he offered me berth in is the *Roaming Death*.”

“Queer name for a ship,” I said.

“What else is any ship that carries guns?” Dan asked. “And ’tis a good name, lad!”

“Good enough to remember when once seen,” I told him. “I’ faith I did see that same ship only this morning, riding at anchor, and thought me many things!”

“Tell me those same another time, lad,” Rodney said with a laugh. “For now, an you can mind you, lead the way to it. For, lad, I’ve a fancy that I’ll do this night what I’d a mind to do on the morrow.”

“Join her?” I asked, without a doubt but that was what he meant, and in that was I right.

“Aye, Roger,” he said. “Many things there be that I must tell you yet, but they can wait awhile. This much I will tell you now—— Go ye the way to the *Roaming Death*, lad?” he interrupted himself to ask me, and I told him that I was heading a course for the ship of the gruesome name. “It is good,” he went on. “I hold me in the lining of my breeches wealth enough to charter me a ship to go whither I would go, and such I did intend. But that was before those things happened which have happened. Now I am afraid——”

I laughed at him, and he growled at me.

“An any man else called me afraid I’d run him through!” he admitted. “But, Roger, lad, I do confess that I be afraid now. Since that man with the beard, whom I know not, acted so, and since you told me the

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name of yon tavern"—he nodded back the way we had come—"I do begin to think things; and one of them is that there be folk in England who know something of the Flaming Cross, and another that there be those who know of me. By the Queen's ruff!"

The exclamation was so sudden, and the voice that uttered it so fierce, that I knew on the instant that something untoward had come to Rodney's mind.

"'Tis a good oath!" I told him, with a soft laugh.

"Aye, a good oath on a bad subject!" was his retort. "Bah! to think that I did not know him before."

"Who?" I asked. "The man with the beard?"

"Nay, not that rogue o' the window," he said, "but that paunched villain you called Williams."

"Wily Williams, of the Flaming Cross?" I said, and he growled.

"'Tis a new name he's taken. I mind me the squint of his eyes and the lost ear. He was Squint-Eye Hawke in those days!"

"Tell on, but a little faster, Dan," I said impatiently. "What mean you?"

"What but that that rogue you call Williams was one o' the white slaves under Cousins!" was the startling reply. "Aye, and more than that, he was one of those who went with me to hide the Flaming Cross! Bah! but I thought him dead. Did I not see him fall in the fight and lie for dead, and left for that by the Spaniards when they whipped us in a long train back to Santa Marta?"

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“An you be right, Dan Rodney, he was not dead, but lived and escaped somehow,” I said, like a foolish child stating a very plain truth. “It does indeed seem that you be right somewhere, else why the tavern’s name? Yet an Williams, or Hawke, whatever be his name, knew the hiding place, why——”

“Didn’t he go seeking it?” Dan finished for me. “Because, my lad, he was always a white-livered coward. Methinks he was glad to get him back to England, whence he had been shipped as a pressed man for his sins. Yet see you not this, lad, that even now, after all these years, he is of a mind to do something about the Flaming Cross? Else—faugh! Is he not leagued with that other, lad?”

To this there was no answer, since it seemed like very truth. I did content myself with asking:

“What, then, is it you do propose, Dan? You charter not a ship and——”

“Join the *Roaming Death*,” he told me. “That sailorman did say that she is even now seeking men who’ve known the Main, for some mysterious purpose. Thither go I with her, for an she want men who know the Main, methinks ’tis to the Main she goes. Wilt come with me, an you can get berth?”

“Whether in the *Roaming Death* or in ship of your own, Dan Rodney,” I told him, “there goes Roger Hampsley. And here be that same *Roaming Death*,” I said.

We came to a halt on the quayside and I saw ship’s

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lights which, as the vessel had not moved since morning, should be those of the *Roaming Death*.

"Your hand on it, lad," Dan said, and we gripped hands in the falling snow. Then, with a bellow like a storm bell, he hailed the ship.

"Ship ahoy, there! Ahoy, *Roaming Death*!"

Came from the vessel a hail, much questioning and much answering, and much cursing as we heard the sounds of a boat being cast off; then a moving light 'twixt the shadowy form of the ship and the quayside. Then presently the grating of a boat against the wooden piles, followed immediately by our clambering down and dropping into the boat.

Five minutes later Dan Rodney and I stood, caps in hand, before a man seated in the low cabin of the *Roaming Death*, a man upon whose face the lanthorn cast a worrying light. Not many seconds did we stand there thus, for with a great shout Dan Rodney sprang forward, thrusting a horny hand out and saying:

"By the Lord Harry, 'tis Ted Larby himself! Here's the hand of Dan Rodney!"

They shook hands like old friends, as indeed they were, and as they told me when they had finished. Friends who had roamed many seas shipmates. And now, as Larby told Dan, he was captain of a vessel, a position won by many a gallant battle.

Many other things did Larby tell us that night, and many things did Dan tell him. But chief of all that

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I remember is this, given when the two men had drained many a beaker :

“So you’ve come aboard the *Roaming Death*, Dan?” Larby said. “Know you where she goes?”

“Aye, an my imaginings be right,” Rodney told him. “That seaman o’ yours did say that you wanted men who knew the Main. Where else then but to the Main d’you go? Tell me that!”

Larby laughed.

“Shake, Dan,” and he thrust out his knarled hand again. “’Tis to the Main we go, and not us alone. For——” He hesitated, and stared at the door as though afraid lest there should be ears in it. Then he leaned forward. “Listen! We go to the Main in company with Drake and Hawkins!”

CHAPTER III

ANOTHER WHO KNEW THE SECRET

YOU, my masters, who read this tale of mine can have but little idea of the thrill that ran through me when I heard those words of Captain Larby of the *Roaming Death*; indeed, even I, who heard them, I, who in that moment knew that his words were a call to me to go a-venturing into the golden and mysterious west, do as I write have but little understanding of what I really felt. Nevertheless will I try to tell something of it all. I mind me how he glanced around the gloomy smoke-filled cabin, as a dark plotter might do, and how his eyes sparkled as he breathed the magic words:

“We go to the Main—and we go with Drake!”

Words those, my friend, to make the heart of any man and any boy—aye, and I had almost said of any woman with good rich British blood coursing in her veins—leap joyously. For—I speak now of that sort of history that is to be found in broadsheets and in books—was it not Hawkins, the gallant Sir John, who had thrust his troublesome nose into the Dons’ affairs on the Main when the Spaniards reckoned they had that same place to themselves? And was it not Hawkins and Drake who had swooped along the Main

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and reaped rich harvest afore they were well-nigh destroyed, traitorously, at San Juan Ulloa? More, was it not Drake who had gone out to the west several times since then and, by plundering the Dons, sacking their towns and giving them to the flames, taken a rare revenge? Too, had not Franky Drake encircled the world, to come back and in due time help smash the mighty Armada of King Philip? Aye, I tell you the very thought of going a-voyaging, whether only down to Spain or perchance to the Main itself, was to me like wine to a man, and I sprang to my feet.

“Captain Larby,” I said, scarce able to speak for my panting breath: “an you want a ship’s boy to scrub the decks or carry cook’s slops, I pray you give me chance of it!”

“Steady, Roger!” Dan Rodney told me, laying a hand upon my arm. “Sit you down and leave this work to me!”

“There’s no need for you to do any work, Dan,” Larby said. “I see that the boy has a mind to go whither you go, and if so be he wants a berth, why, there’s my hand on’t.”

He gripped my poor hand in a fist that was like iron itself, and ’twas all I could do to keep myself from crying aloud.

“Thank you, sir,” I said, “both for the handgrip and for the offer you give me—the offer that I accept.”

Both Larby and Rodney laughed at my words, and thereupon Dan fell to telling the captain who I was,

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and how he had found me, and many more things—though not a word did he say, I'll have you know, of the Flaming Cross, from which I gathered that however great a shipmate Larby was, he was nevertheless not one to whom, for the time being at any rate, Dan was inclined to give news of his project.

"Methinks ye were rather in a hurry to get aboard, Dan!" Larby said, after a while, and between gulps from the bowl before him.

"So we were, cap'n," said Dan, "so we were, and so would ye have been, I'll warrant me, an you had been in our shoes. To-morrow was the time I'd fixed to join you, but—well, Ted Larby—beg pardon, cap'n!" and he grinned at the skipper on the other side of the table. "Well, cap'n, we did fall foul of harbor thieves and rogues, and since the night was unfriendly too, and we knew not whither to go, we did decide to come hither. So here we are."

"Where ye are welcome, shipmate," Larby said. "One more dip," and he handed over the bowl. "Here's to Franky Drake and a blustering sweep down the Main!"

I tell you that although I drank not of that toast, I said it with just as much fervor as those two men; and then Larby bellowed out a call which brought a dwarfed and hunchbacked, villainous-looking fellow slouching into the cabin.

"Ho, there, Crouchy!" Larby said. "Here be the new gunner's mate and his boy. Take them to their

quarters—and forby it may be as well that ye pass the word that he'll be a fool who crosses Dan Rodney."

"Aye, aye, cap'n," Crouchy muttered, pulling his oiled forelock, and then held open the cabin door for us.

We passed out into the dimly lit passageway, and so to the stinking, clammy 'tween decks that, already crowded with men, was to be our living place.

"Pish, lad!" said Dan, as he saw my nostrils twitch and my chest heave against the atmosphere that met us. "Ye'll be used to't ere long. Get you to sleep now! Ye need it!"

It was the truth, indeed, so true was it that although I felt me sicken as I laid me down, I was soon in a state when nothing mattered; blessed sleep came to me and held me until a hundred and one noises awoke me, and I found Dan Rodney looking down at me with a grin on his face.

"Up wi' ye, Roger!" he said. "There be a boatload o' men come aboard, and what think you?"

"Scarce have I driven sleep far enough away to think," I told him, with a short laugh. "Think for me!"

"They brought news—news that idle chatterers give and of no set purpose—that last night there was a tavern burned to th' ground, one named the Flaming Cross, an you know of it."

He laughed with me, but suddenly his face assumed gravity again.

"Listen, lad," he said. "That rascal Williams or Hawke was burned, as they do burn witches. I asked

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some questions, careless like, which brought me answers that he alone was thus ended: all else in th' house seem 'counted for."

"Then——" I began, but Roger nodded and said:

"That villain who's dogged me—heaven knows how long—and that, lad, is a thing that worries me not a little, that and how 'twas known to him that I had the map, that I was indeed Dan Rodney, lately come from the Main—that villain, I say, though he be wounded, is alive. Therefore, methinks we did but right in coming aboard this ship in the night. But come above, lad: although there be no fighting in an English port, there be a-plenty to do; and as I have found out, we do set sail to-day for Plymouth, there to meet——"

"Drake!" I exclaimed, with a sharp intake of breath, and Roger nodded that that was so.

I broke me my fast on rough victuals and then hurried up on to deck, where I found scores of men doing, seemingly, hundreds of tasks. Son of a sea-rover though I was, yet had I never been aboard a big vessel; my father, I think, had of set purpose held me back from that, lest the taint of the sea got into my blood and sent me a-roving as he had done, but I do tell it now, that when I watched the sails unfurled and belly out to the breeze, and felt the movements of the *Roaming Death*, something in me sprang to life and I knew that it must be the legacy that my father had given me in my blood. I would not have changed

my place in that ship for a seat even beside Queen Bess.

I was going whither my father had gone before me, and I wanted nothing better of life.

It was while I was thinking such things as these that something happened to distract my attention from myself. I was standing with Dan Rodney beside the gun that was to be our especial care, and stroking it gently and proudly—ah me! I was a fire-eating youth in those days, and never more so than at that moment—when, of a sudden, the ship being many yards from the shore, a man sprang on to the port side within three yards of me, and before I realized what was afoot, he had gone diving overboard.

“Man—overboard!” I cried.

There was a rush of many feet; men craned their necks over the side, expecting, I doubt not, to see some one drowning. Instead, they saw, and I too saw, a man swimming with strong strokes and making good way, despite his clogging clothes, straight for the shore.

“Who was’t?” a sailorman asked me, but I shook my head, and he, not having seen me before, and knowing that I was therefore a newcomer, turned to another. The answer was that the man who had thus gone overboard was one of those who had come aboard but a little while before the ship weighed anchor.

“Art not going to save him?” I hazarded; but the men around laughed.

“There be no order to lower a boat!” said one of

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them. "That man, it would seem, has changed his mind and likes better dry land to the stinking hulk we're on! Let him go, an he want to! He's in no danger of drowning—see!"

True enough was that, for the man was by now within easy distance of the shore. I caught me sight of Dan Rodney at that moment and moved over towards him.

"One man grown tired o' things already, Dan," I told him, and then stopped because I noticed the queer look on his face. "What is't?" I asked, at last.

"Lad," he whispered, taking me by the arm and drawing me aside, "I like it not!"

"To wit, what?" I asked him.

"Why, Roger, that man was one of those in the tatern when we did enter last night. I saw him not when he came aboard, but a little ago we met—and he did give a start that made me wonder and cudgel my mind to think where 'twas I had seen him. Then, I knew: and now—Roger, I like it not!" he repeated. "Why should the fellow join ship and then desert in such fashion?"

"Why?" was all I could ask, leaving it for Rodney to give his own answer.

"Grown cautious I am, Roger!" Dan told me. "But I do feel it in th' bones that he would go carry the news of our being here to some one who will pay well for it!"

"Thine enemy!" I exclaimed, and Dan nodded

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gravely. "Little harm that can do us now," I said, then. "We're off and away to——"

"Where first but to Plymouth?" Dan asked me. "And then—think you that the fleet will sail all of a sudden because we arrive? An there be intent to find us, there will be plenty of time, never fear. Nay, lad, I like it not. But there—Dan Rodney has weathered many a storm bigger than the one he's thinking may arise. Stout hearts and clear heads—that's what we'll be a-keeping, Roger! How like you the feel of a deck beneath the feet?"

"I feel—I feel," I began, soberly, then eagerly: "I doubt not, Dan, that I feel like that dear father of mine felt many a time! There be no finer place under heaven, to be sure!"

Dan laughed at me.

"Laugh while ye can, lad—laugh while ye can!" he said, and I wondered what he meant.

Yet, ah me, it was not long before I knew: it was not long before I would have thanked him who could have put me back on shore.

Strangely enough, down the Bristol Channel all was well—it was when we swung round into the open sea and a great wind caught us and seemed to hurl us backward, that I found me possessed of a stomach that liked not things. . . . I fought against it all, but I fought a losing battle: and losing, dropped into kindly unconsciousness. Afterwards, days afterwards, when the *Roaming Death* had outlived and passed the

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storm and was sailing within sight of the Devon coast, Dan Rodney told me that 'twas the worst time that he had ever known in English seas, though naught to what he'd seen in other parts.

"Heaven save us, Roger," he told me, "but I did think you'd come to the end of the voyage at the start of't."

"I, too, Dan," I said, rocking yet on my legs. "I feel I'd like to see the water and feel the touch of God's air on my face now."

"Come up, then, lad," he said gently, and helped me along and piloted me to the taffrail, whence, holding on, for I own shamedly that I was still quaking and uneasy of stomach, I watched the creaming wake of the ship.

And as I watched, I found me wondering when next I should see Bristol that we had left these days before: and wondered, too, what the unknown west held for me. Fire mounted to my face, and blood to my head. I had forgotten all about Dan Rodney's Flaming Cross. One thing only held me, and that was that soon—"heaven grant it be very soon!"—I prayed—I should be going into the alluring west, in company with as gallant sailormen as ever trod wooden deck.

The *Roaming Death* dipped her flag as she ran to anchor among a crowd of weather-beaten ships which were, one and all, in the hands of the carpenters and the painters, taking on to themselves gay colors and a freshness that made the heart feel good.

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I was standing at the side with Dan Rodney when we thus ran to anchor, and suddenly my friend, laying a hand upon my arm, pointed out towards a mighty vessel that towered above us—we like a cockleshell beside it.

“’Tis his ship, lad—’tis his!” he exclaimed, and glancing at him, I saw his rugged face smothered with tense emotion.

“Whose, Dan Rodney?” I asked him, staring across at a vessel which had her name painted on her side: *Defiance* I read, and I supposed that it must be one commanded by an old-time comrade of Rodney’s.

“Whose should it be but—I’faith!” he ejaculated, “there he is himself!”—and I saw a man, stumpy of build, with well-trimmed pointed beard, walk across the poop of the vessel. “Lad——” Dan went on, eagerly, “I tell ye that ship is Drake’s and that man is Franky Drake himself!”

A short laugh from Dan Rodney brought me to myself a moment or so later, and he said, clapping me on the shoulder:

“Aye, lad, ’tis good to see him, and better still to know that we shall be sailing under his command: for Cap’n Larby does tell me that when all the work on the ships is done we shall, and other ships that shall join the fleet, leave for the west. All must be fitted out first and then ’tis away we go! Ah—see you? Drake goes ashore, the whither we too shall go presently, lad, for a stretch o’ the legs.”

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I saw, indeed, that Francis Drake had descended to a longboat riding beside his ship, and that he was being rowed across shorewards.

There came at that moment the sound of a shrilling whistle, and I knew that it was the signal for hoisting out a boat—a boat into which, presently, Captain Larby went, after having agreed that Dan Rodney and I should go ashore as well: the which we were not loath to do, I can assure you.

When we got there Rodney and I detached ourselves from the rest of the company, and I, who had never been thus far from Bristol before, did request of my companion that he take me on to the Hoe itself that I might gaze from there out on to the Channel up which that pricked-bubble of an Armada had sailed not so many years ago.

Wherefore, Dan did so, and I fancied—how a youth's mind does run to fanciful things!—that I could see those great men, Drake among them, playing their bowls the while a ship flew before the wind, and that man, Flemming, did hasten to give warning of the coming of the Armada: and hear me those words of Drake about playing the game first and beating the Dons after.

“'Tis sworn that it is true, lad!” Dan Rodney said seriously, when I did mention the matter to him, and as he spoke another voice sounded, so that I turned and could have dropped me to the earth because it was

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the voice of Drake himself, and the great man stood before me.

"Well, well, young sir," the Admiral said: "whether 'tis all true or not, this much is true—those Dons were beaten that day!"

"Sir," I said, bowing to him, "that do I know, and this also: that you, Sir Francis Drake, did no little towards that beating!"

"Ho, ho! young man!" the Admiral said, laughing, "so you know me!"

"Sir," I said, "I know you because this my good friend, Dan Rodney, did tell me who you were."

"Rodney?"—I saw Drake pucker up his brows a bit, as though trying to recall something. Suddenly he shot out a hand which snatched at Dan's jerkin, and before Rodney realized what was afoot, had torn it open, and scrambled the man's shirt open too. "*That* Rodney!" Drake exclaimed, as before his eyes was revealed the blood-scratched map. "Cover it, man, and come ye aboard the *Defiance* this night. I would have word with you."

And then he was gone, leaving us staring at each other like two foolish yokels.

"Well, sooth, that's passing strange!" said Dan at last. "How came it that he knew this?"

"That you should know of better than I," was all I could say.

"Lad, I begin to think there be too many people who know of this map!" Dan Rodney said. "And so,

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Roger, I'm thinking that 'twere well to wear a shirt shaped so that snatching hands cannot lay bare what's written on this chest of mine. We'll go buy me one even now!"

I laughed at him, but nevertheless knew that he was serious, and, knowing how much store he set by that map, and what it meant for him, I was not surprised. We went us to a dealer and there Rodney bought him the shirt he needed, and so impetuous and importunate was he, that what did he do else but ask the man whether it was convenient that he should put on the shirt there.

"An you mind not changing your shirt in th' room where another man is—seaman like yourself, my master," the dealer told him, "then you can do it."

At Rodney's nod, he led us through his stuffy shop and to a door which he opened, a door that led into a none too light room, since it was now getting towards the twilight and there was no light in the room except what came from a window in the far end of it.

"Thankee," said Rodney, stepping in, and I after him.

As I turned to close the door, but with my face still looking towards the window, I saw a form thrown up against the light outside—the form of a man who even then had his arms thrown over his head as he stripped himself of clothing.

"'Twill not be long in the doing of this, lad," Dan Rodney said to me.

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As he spoke I saw the man at the other end jerk himself up from his half bent position and realized that he was staring at us from between the neck-hole of his shirt. Then, he suddenly turned so that his face was away from us. I took no further notice of him, nor did Rodney, who proceeded to divest himself of jerkin and shirts and to don the new clout that he had just bought. Dan, even in that dim light, was caution itself, for he turned his back on the other man in the room, while I, heedless altogether of the man, sat me down on a chest and lolled the while Rodney busied himself.

But there came a moment when I heard something that made me turn my head sharply, something that I, with my knowledge of firearms taught me by my father, took to be the cocking of a pistol; and even as I looked at the man, the while that Dan Rodney had his arms half in and half out his new shirt, I saw the outlined shape of the other man's arm against the window light—and springing to my feet, pulled out my cutlass and flung myself between him and Dan.

For I had seen that the man's thrust-out hand held a pistol, pointing at my comrade.

Merciful was heaven in that moment, for I heard the click of the hammer, but naught else except the muttered imprecation of the man, and then I was upon him, my cutlass slashing at his arm so that he uttered a sharp cry and fell away, even as his pistol dropped to the floor.

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“At you for a murdering rogue!” I bellowed, and thrust at him again, but he was too quick for me.

He turned and jumped full at the window, which shattered before his impact and tinkled into a thousand bits as he disappeared through the opening and I after him, leaving Dan Rodney shouting at me as he leaned half out of the broken window with only his new shirt and his breeches on.

CHAPTER IV

STRANGE MEETINGS

I WASTED no time; I was bent on following my man, whom I could see running swiftly and who then disappeared round the corner. Folk rushed from near houses, roused by the smashing of the glass, and when I dashed me down the street it was with half a hundred people behind me.

Fortunate I was that evening, for a time, since turning the corner, I did see my quarry not far in front and still running; there were no side streets for him to turn into, so it seemed, and, fleet-footed as I was, I soon overtook him and had him with his back to a wall, and lunging back at me as I flung myself upon him.

A rare fight that was, I remember: no mean hand with the sword was I—my father had taught me not a little; but so, too, was my foe a good man, and I was hard put to it not merely to get within his guard, but to defend myself.

Around us the crowd herded, and a babble of tongues sounded in my already buzzing ears. I was excited, and yet, after the first few moments, I got a grip upon myself and my brain cleared.

“A cool head and a keen eye!” I minded me my

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father's oft-spoken words, and as I did so, lunged in with a pretty trick that he had taught me too—a trick which got my blade, with a lightning dart, across the man's clenched fingers as they gripped his own sword, so that he dropped his steel with a howl of pain.

And then, just as I thought I had him, that foolish mob, which had been making so much of commotion, were my undoing from that very cause; watchmen had turned out and forced their way through the crowd, or tried to do so, with the result, my masters, that in the confusion my enemy did get mixed up with them, and wounded though he was, escaped. The watch seized me.

“Over young ye be for a cutthroat!” one of them said to me, and I could have spitted him as he spoke, but that wisdom came to me.

“No cutthroat am I!” I told him angrily. “That man it is, an ye would find the cutthroat who caused all this——” And I told them quickly what had happened—though there was one thing that I kept to myself, and that was, that he whom I had attacked thus, was none other than the very rogue who had fallen upon Dan Rodney on that white night in Bristol: for I had recognized him even as we were fighting!

“A likely enough story,” said the watchman. “Ho, there, where be t’other?”

But none there was who could say what had happened to mine enemy, though there were folk ready to say that they had seen me make the attack upon him! Whereat, the watch did laugh and swear that they

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were right in calling me cutthroat. Whereat, too, was I more angry, and was like to have fallen upon them had not one of them said:

"An you speak truth, take us to that shop where you say this man sprang through th' window."

"Right ready will I do that!" I said, and then, for the life of me, could not recall to mind the way that I had come.

"Hurry!" said the watchman. "Hurry—an you speak the truth at all!"

"What truth is't you want to know, my masters?" bellowed a voice, and my heart leaped for joy, for it was the voice of Dan Rodney.

"Dan!" I exclaimed rapturously, and fell to telling him what had happened.

"An these good men want the truth," he said, then, "let them come with me: I know where the shop is, and they can see for themselves the broken window and the dropped pistol!"

Whereat, there began a procession, and a noisy one it was, too, towards the dealer's, whom we found bemoaning his broken window, and the fact that the man who had disappeared had gone without paying for the new clothes that he had bought, leaving only his old tattered ones behind him. As for the watch, we soon had them pacified, and a coin or two slipped carefully by Dan Rodney sent them away rejoicing, and thereby leaving Dan Rodney and me to quiet

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the dealer, which Rodney did by paying him for the broken window, for, as he said:

“But that the rogue jumped through it maybe I’d have been killed by him, so in a manner o’ speaking, master, I owe you a duty.”

As he spoke, he was fingering the cast-off clothing of the rogue who had fled, and, doing so, felt something in a pocket of the breeches. Dan drove his hand into the pocket, and when it came out there was a parchment of some kind in it, the which, by the rush-light the dealer had brought in, he examined awhile. Then, without saying a word, he placed it in his own pocket and proceeded to go through all the other pockets of our enemy’s clothing, though nothing else did he find.

“I fear me that they will give you but little recompense for your new clothes, master,” Dan said casually to the dealer as he flung the clothing on to the floor again. “For which am I sorry. An you will lead us out we will away to our ship, for it is getting dark!”

The man thereupon, still bemoaning his ill fortune, showed us into the street and we hastened ourselves down to the harbor. The while we did so I said:

“Tell me, Dan Rodney, what ’twas ye found in that pocket?”

“Something, lad,” he said, “that our friend would not have lost, methinks, for much gold!”

“Which tells me not anything,” I retorted, and he laughed back at me.

“Lad, ye are as impatient as ye are inquisitive,” he said. “But I’ll tell ye that parchment is naught else than a written account, ill-spelled, ’tis true, so that I have not yet understood it all, of how six men did, years ago, bury gold and silver and the Flaming Cross on a hillside on the Main! And ’tis signed by your friend Williams of Bristol!”

“Heaven save us,” I said. “Are we ever to be pestered by——”

“I feel it in the bones of me,” Dan put in, “that as long as that man, whoever he is, lives, we shall be pestered by him, but, an we prove as able to take care of ourselves as we have this day, we need not fear too much! But speak not of it now, lad, let’s wait until we’ve read the parchment later. We be nigh late for the returning boat, methinks!”

By this time we were at the place where we had landed, and to our joy found the boat of the *Roaming Death* still there. Rodney asked if Captain Larby had yet gone aboard, and was told he had not, but that a messenger had come down to say that he would be there in about an hour’s time, being detained on pressing business.

“I fancy I know what that business is!” Dan said to me, with a short laugh. “Larby was ever a man for the bowl! Lad, thou mayst kick me for an unmindful fool—since I did forget that we have an engagement with Sir Francis Drake!”

I, too, had forgotten it in the excitement of affairs, and now wondered how we were to get to the ship.

But Dan Rodney was never at a loss.

“An hour, you say?” he asked the man in the boat, “ere the captain does return? Well, then, there is a silver coin for you an you will take us over to the *Defiance*.”

The mention of the ship's name seemed to strike the sailorman dumb for a minute, and all he could do was to stare at us as the light from his lantern shone into our faces. Then, he burst out with it, sneering as he spoke:

“Right well is it that two common sailormen go a-visiting the Admiral himself!”

“Nonsense, my good man!” said Rodney. “There be a friend aboard the *Defiance* with whom I would speak. The silver coin is——”

“Mine, an you keep your word!” the sailor said, and next moment we two were in the boat with him, he tugging at the oars, and Rodney setting the course.

That course took us in a diagonal from where we started, and some thirty yards away we came across another boat with two men in her, one rowing and the other sitting peering into the gloom, as I could see, though I saw not his face.

We passed the boat, which was not going very fast, and presently saw the dim mass of another nearer in to the shore than we. Glancing behind me, for what reason I know not, I saw the first boat suddenly shoot

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forward a little, then swing so that its course was between us and the other craft, and, as if by accident, the lantern on the first boat dropped suddenly into the water.

"Bid the man hold on to his oars!" I whispered to Dan. "There be something passing strange, surely, in all this," and I told him quickly what I had seen.

Ere I had finished, my eyes watching the two boats, saw them nigh upon each other, and then above the sound of splashing oars and of oars in the rowlocks came the report of a pistol, and I saw a flash. Next instant, the two boats had crashed into each other, and our own rower, at a word from Dan, pulled hard as Dan steered a course towards the muddle.

It took us not long, either, to reach the spot, and there we found that one of the boats, that which had held the two men alone, had a hole in her and was even then sinking, while the other was in confusion as the impact had sent her occupants tumbling together, and above the noise I heard a voice that I had heard once before that day, that of Francis Drake himself.

"Ho, there!" he was shouting, "seize you that villain!" and I knew that he was referring to whoever it was who had fired the shot, and since I had seen it, I knew that it had come from the other boat. Whereat, as you may believe, I swung aloft our own lantern and peered into that same boat to find only one man in it, and he vainly trying to get away from the restraining hands of a man in Drake's boat, who, craning over the

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side, had him well secured. For a moment all was confusion.

“There was another!” I cried, and swung around my lantern, seeking the man and saw something black on the surface, something that I knew to be a swimming man.

Again you will believe me when I say that I shouted:

“After him—there he is!” and Rodney, at the tiller, peered into the darkness the while our oarsman pulled as he had not pulled us before, and so brought us nigh up with the man who, swimming sometimes on the surface and sometimes below, was, as I could tell, no mere learner in the art. Truly I had felt that we should not catch him before he reached shore, which had been but twenty yards away when we started after him, and on this he had no doubt counted. As ’twas, we only came up with him when he was little more than five yards from the land, and the tide being in, he could do naught but swim instead of scrambling out on his feet, in which case he must have escaped us. Nevertheless, I was not for allowing him to get away and at risk of upsetting the boat made a spring that dropped me into the water, knocking our light from its hold as I did so. Thereupon I struck out after him, seizing him by rare good fortune by an ankle, and dragging him beneath the water. Then, thanks be, Dan Rodney, too, entered the water, and between us we did get our man.

It took us not long to get him into our boat, and then

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to row back with him to where we could see the bobbing lights of Drake's craft.

"Hast got him?" I heard Drake ask, and Rodney told him that we had.

"Then fling the rogue in here!" shouted Drake. "We'll hang him at the yardarm for a murderous rascal!"

"An it please you, sir," said Dan Rodney, "we'll not trouble to load your Excellency's boat with this scum, since we do be going to the *Defiance*."

"Ho, ho! ye do!" cried Drake. "For what, an I may ask you?"

"To keep an engagement that you yourself was pleased to make with us," Dan told him. "On the Hoe this afternoon!"

"I'faith—I do remember your voice, man!" Drake said, and I, even in that moment, did note that he mentioned not Dan's name, and found myself wondering why. Then, Drake spoke again: "Bring you the rascal—we have his companion in sin! We'll find out who they be!"

Which words set our rower at his oars again, and so the two boats came alongside Drake's ship. Within a little while, Drake having gone aboard first, we were all on the deck, Drake's seamen having insisted on hoisting the prisoners up, one of them conscious and the other still senseless: we had done naught for him

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till then, neither had we been able to see him since we had no lantern, ours lying at the bottom of the Sound.

Cold I was and shivering, with my clothes clinging to me, and dripping water on the deck as I stood there, waiting for the seamen to get the captives aboard. The chattering of my teeth seemed tremendously noisy to me, but it was not so noisy that I did not hear Drake say quietly to Rodney:

“Dan Rodney, come you below, you and that young companion of yours, and get you those wet clothes off ye: then would I have word with you.”

Thereupon, a man standing near by did lead Dan and me away, and, pressing us to drink from a steaming bowl, did also take from us our clothes and hand us towels with which to rub ourselves dry. Nay, he gave us, too, other clothes to wear, the while, as he said, our own should be dried ready for us.

Scarcely had we done this ere a man put his head in at the cabin door and said:

“An you be ready, his Excellency would have you come, my masters.”

Whereat, as I need scarcely say, I for one jumped to my feet and followed him, Dan hard upon my heels. I gave me way, however, a moment later to my comrade, saying:

“I’faith, Dan, one would think ’twas I and not you whom the Admiral needs!”

Dan laughed softly, and next moment, almost, our guide struck upon a door, and at a word from within,

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did throw it open and pilot us in, where we found in a splendidly appointed cabin the Admiral himself, together with several other men in rich garments, and standing, like sullen dogs and cowed, two others—both of them dripping wet.

And I would have you know that never did man get greater shock than I—unless it were Dan Rodney himself—when I saw that one of them was none other than the man whom I had fought and wounded such a little while before in that street behind the Hoe!

The moment that Dan Rodney set eyes upon that bedraggled and downcast figure standing in Drake's cabin, and recognized it as that of the man who had several times attacked him, I thought me that despite the presence of the great Admiral he would hurl himself upon his mysterious enemy. For, standing beside him, I felt his form stiffen, and glancing at him, saw him move as though he would spring forward.

"Hold, Dan!" I whispered quickly, laying a hand upon his arm.

The words and the touch served to restrain him. Whereupon, he stood staring at the man, the while that Drake, as I saw, looked from one to the other of them.

Then the Admiral spoke.

"Look ye, Master Rodney, 'tis the man whose hand you and your young comrade did prevent from doing me ill, and for that do I thank you."

" 'Tis a thing that I am honored to have done, sir,

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and so, too, my friend Roger Hampsley," said Rodney handsomely, and I flushed as he spoke. Also, I saw when I glanced up at Drake again that he was quizzing at me.

"Hampsley?" he said hastily. "An thy father, young master, was Roger Hampsley of Bristol, I knew him well—and knew him for a brave man."

"It was the same, sir," I told him proudly. "Oft have I heard him speak of you, sir, and the days when he sailed the seas under you."

Which was indeed the truth, for my father had been with Drake on one of his voyages to the Spanish Main.

"I trust me that he is——" Drake began, but something in my eyes must have told him the truth even before I blurted out:

"Sir, he is dead!"

"God rest his soul!" said the Admiral, and I knew he spoke sincerely and not as comes from the lips of a canting hypocrite. "But, of him will we speak, mayhap, another time. Now there is this caitiff to deal with. Master Rodney," he turned to Dan as he spoke, "I saw that in your face that told me plainly enough as if it had been written on paper that you have met this rogue aforetime. Know you who he is?"

"Nay, sir," Dan told him, "that I know not. All that I do know of him is that thrice in Bristol City and once here in Plymouth—and that last, even this very day—he has tried his murderous tricks on me. I'faith, I would like to know more about him!"

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“Look you at his face!” said Drake, and pointed an accusing finger at the man. “See you not, have ye not seen before, that he is no Englishman, but a dog of a Spaniard?”

At that, I confess, I did push forward my head as if to get a closer view of the man, who in his turn started back as if the words had caught him unawares; while Dan Rodney took a step forward, and, silent for a moment, said afterwards:

“Sir, an it please you to know, this is the first time that, in real light by which a man could see full plainly another’s features, I have seen this fellow: and I do see that you speak right when you say he is a dog of a Spaniard. And, sir, now do I begin to understand something of why——”

“Enough of that, master!” exclaimed Drake suddenly, holding up a hand. “Speak not what you would say for the time. *I know!* Let me but say this, and then have the villain taken out and put in irons until the morning when we will run him to the yardarm, and so keep him from troubling more. Dog of a Spaniard as he is, he is none other than Don Enriquez, brother of a man who was governor of a port on the Main—a very particular port I wot of, and that once knew what ’twas to feel the tread of English feet up its streets! Ho, there, without!”

At his sharp call a man entered, and at command, did force Enriquez and his comrade from the cabin, the Spaniard going out like a whipped cur, and as he passed

me I saw that his right hand was bandaged, and knew that my shrewd thrust earlier on had given him something by which to remember me until the moment when he was swinging on the yardarm of which Drake spoke.

"Gentlemen!"—Drake looked at the officers around him as he spoke—"an you mind not I would have counsel alone with this man Rodney and his companion."

Whereat, the men rose to their feet and went from the cabin, leaving us marveling—Rodney and me—as to why Drake would not speak his mind in presence of his own and trusted officers. We were not, though, left in wonder long, for scarcely had the door closed behind them, and Drake himself had close-fastened it after them, than he, seating himself again and bidding us be the same, said:

"Master Rodney, know you why 'tis that I would speak with you?"

"Your Excellency," Dan told him, "this only do I know, that it must have something to do with that map which hides behind a new shirt that I bought to-day to save quick hands from revealing it!"

Drake's laugh at that was good to hear, and I knew that he was a man who could enjoy another's joke, even though 'twas directed at him.

"Well spoken, and with wit, Master Rodney!" he said, when his laugh was over.

"I know what 'tis you speak of! Aye, you are right

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about that map—'tis on that I would have things to say, or, rather, to ask."

"'Tis a thing of wonder to me, sir," said Dan boldly, "how it came about that you knew of the map, as know you surely do. Six men there were ever in this world who knew that that map existed, or so I thought, and four of them died on the Main, and one whose fate I knew not of until but a short while ago when, thanks be, I was the means of giving him his deservements, so that he no longer lives; and I myself—nay—one other, this young master, my friend's son and my friend too."

"Master Rodney," Drake said quietly, tapping the table before him with stubby fingers, "most that you say is true, but in one particular are you wrong; four of those men did not die out on the Main. Three of them did, the fourth I, years ago, did save from a Spanish vessel where he was a prisoner, and though he died not long afterwards, even while aboard my ship, before he died he spoke of a thing that I wotted of, even then, the Flaming Cross of Santa Marta. He spoke, too, of a man, one Dan Rodney, who had cut upon his chest a chart that showed where it had been hidden. That man gave the name of—let me see, 'twas awhile ago, as I tell you, and a man cannot remember all names of folk he meets." He paused, but Dan Rodney came to his rescue:

"Hawke—nay, 'twas not he, for he died in Bristol

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but a little while ago, as I told you. Singleton? Pendreth or——”

“ ’Tis that same!” exclaimed Drake. “I do mind it now. Aye, ’twas Pendreth, and he died on my own ship. Now, list you, Master Rodney: I think me I can trust you and——” he paused again, and his small eyes peered straight and hard at Rodney as though they would read the man’s inmost thoughts and snatch the secrets from his very heart. “Aye, I can trust you!”

“That may you do, sir, on the word of a man who ne’er broke faith with any!” Rodney exclaimed. “And the boy, too—you can trust him! Sir, I am listening!”

“Then list to this,” said Drake. “ ’Tis almost settled—I wait but for the Queen her Majesty’s permission—that, together with Sir John Hawkins, I do go once more to the Main to bring a harvest of treasure from the Dons’ treasure houses. Now, since I have met you, there be something else to go for, ’tis for that Flaming Cross, an you will reveal the hiding place of it.”

“Sir,” said Dan Rodney, and I marveled at his boldness, though had I been older I should have known that he was a rare reader of men’s characters and had rightly read that of Drake’s as a man who would do no ill to a man who trusted him, and who was no foe. “Sir,” he said, “an it were any other man in like situation to your own I should have naught to say but that I was in your power to do with as you will. For certain to me it is that that man Pendreth must have told you ’twas not far from Santa Marta that the Flaming Cross

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was hid, and, therefore, with me in your power you could seize the map by seizing my body, and I doubt not, from it seek and find the hiding place. But there is no need for you to do that thing; I am an Englishman, thanks be, and as such am at the disposal of the Queen her Majesty; therefore am I at yours."

It was a long speech indeed for Dan Rodney, and as he spoke I saw Drake's mouth working tremulously as though the man's devotion were affecting him, as, I do confess, it was me.

"Well spoken, and like a true Englishman!" exclaimed Drake, and I did not marvel in the least now that he reached over and gripped hard Rodney's hand which he seized. "Reward I offer none—'twould be but to insult you, but this one thing I do want now that it does seem possible to get it, I want the Flaming Cross, because know you the superstition regarding it?"

"Aye, sir, I know of that," Rodney told him. "Though I believe not in such things!"

"What, and you a sailorman who has roamed the full seas?" exclaimed Drake. "Man, there be many things that we do call superstition that be founded on more certain ground than fancy. However, let it pass, what you believe; it is sufficient for me that the Dons have a faith that the Flaming Cross is a cross of destiny—and 'tis whispered in Spain that 'tis because it is not known where the Cross is that all the many ills of the past years have come upon the Dons. I would that I could set the Flaming Cross behind bars

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in the Tower at London, or nail it to my mainmast and go sweeping into a Spanish harbor with a lantern throwing light upon it. I warrant you 'twould be enough to make those dogs scuttle away! What matters it whether you or I believe the tale or not, so that they believe it! Master Rodney, you have given your word: I take it—and when we go to the west you go with us. You shall lead us to the place where the Flaming Cross has lain buried these many years, and we will sail us home with it nailed to our mast and with our holds full of gold!”

CHAPTER V

MY FIRST FIGHT WITH THE DONS

THE man's eyes flashed and his face flushed deeper than the tan of it wrought by the sun and the wind, and I marveled at the strange mixture of a man that he was. Gentle sometimes, witty at others, devoted always as a religious in matters affecting his country and his queen, and I loved him that instant.

"Sir," said Dan quietly, but I knew by the tone of his voice that he, too, was affected by Drake's manner, "as you say, I have given you my word. But, an it please you, I would like to say that I have already signed me on, and this young friend of mine, too, to go with you to the Main in the *Roaming Death* under Captain Larby."

"A good man, but oft given to the bowl!" said Drake. "Master Rodney, I trust that you have said nothing to him of the Flaming Cross."

"Nay, sir, not a word," was the reply. "An the truth be told, sir, I had this intention: before I was attacked by the man you call Enriquez, I was for chartering me a ship of mine own to sail to the Main and bring back treasure and the Cross, but did decide not to do that, but to join your company and bide the time when,

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reaching the Main, perchance I might get ashore and find me companions there, as 'tis well known there often be, who would join me in the venture."

"Desert the ship you sailed on!" snapped Drake, and his eyes were fierce looking.

"I would have already paid in my work for the passage, sir," said Dan, and at his words Drake laughed again and again, though I do confess it was not a very convincing argument to me.

"Well, well, we'll let that go," Drake said. "Suffice it that you have given your word and I have taken it. The Flaming Cross is yours, the treasure there with it is yours, too, an it is to be got; you will not grudge your country the Cross, my master?"

"Nay, nor the treasure," said Dan valiantly.

"The treasure shall be yours—'tis your own by right of conquest and of knowledge!" said Drake firmly. "Now list you, master—be there any copy of that chart?"

"Never a one," was the reply.

"Then, 'twere well that there should be. An I promise you that no man but myself shall ever see it, wilt let's copy it now? Ere we reach the Main, my master, none can tell what shall happen."

"A cheerful manner of speaking!" I thought to myself as I heard him, but Dan made no sign of distaste. Merely did he say:

"Sir, I bought me a new shirt, as I told ye, an you

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mind not that I doff it here then can the chart be copied now."

For answer, Drake drew a quill and ink towards him and said:

"Doff the shirt, Master Rodney!"

Whereat Dan did so, and Drake did say to me:

"Master Hampsley—i'faith, now can I remember your father in you!—come you and make the copy for me."

He pushed the parchment and quill and ink towards me. Taking them, I did, for the next several minutes, find myself engrossed in as strange a task as youth ever had—that of copying in black that which was scarred in red upon the chest of Dan Rodney; and, believe me, my masters, there was not one single line nor dot in all that I did that was not graven as lastingly upon my mind as it was upon the parchment before me.

"A fair copy, Roger," Drake said to me when I had finished, and he took the parchment from me, sanded it so that it dried well, and then folding it, placed it in a chest which he locked before our eyes.

"That much is done, and heaven grant that 'fore long the Flaming Cross be nailed to the mast of the good ship *Defiance*! One thing 'tis good to know, and that is, that there be naught now to fear from that rogue Enriquez, for to-morrow he'll swing at the yardarm, as you shall see."

"I'd rather I had spitted him in fair fight, sir!" said Dan gruffly. "I do feel I owe him something for his

villainy! Nevertheless, a snake in th' grass must be stamped on, no matter how! And now, sir, I do think that 'twere time, an it please you, that we went us back to the *Roaming Death*."

To tell the truth, after what had happened, I did expect that Drake would say that we should stay aboard the *Defiance*, and I found myself hoping that such he would say. 'Stead, however, he merely said:

"So you shall go. 'Twere well not to let folk know that you and I have talked—'cept that, mayhap, 'twas about my thanks to you for saving my life. The which I do now, and say that indeed I am thankful to you!"

Spite of the simplicity of those thanks, there was the ring of truth in the words and I for one was pleased to hear them.

"A bumper o' wine to our success," said Drake, pushing a golden goblet over to Rodney. As for me, he looked at me with twinkling eyes and said: "Master Roger, I'll not tempt ye; wine is not for the young!"

"Aye, sir, and that is truth!" I said simply. "Nevertheless, I toast to the same success!"

Two minutes afterwards, we, Dan Rodney and I, were out of the cabin and, led by a man, went us to where our clothes were adrying, received them, changed into them, and then, dark though it was, and late, we were rowed over to the *Roaming Death*. Challenged we were, but answering well, were allowed aboard, where, needless to say, we told only part the truth for

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our delay, and that which concerned the affair of Admiral Drake's escape. True, we did not tell it to Captain Larby that night, for we saw him not, since he was lying in his cabin sleeping off the witlessness of a debauch ashore.

Spite of all the excitement of the day, I had nothing of trouble in getting me to sleep that night, and when morning came I was refreshed as I stood at the side of the *Roaming Death* with Rodney, looking across towards the *Defiance*, expecting to see a limp form swaying at the yardarm.

"It is not there, Roger," Rodney said quietly.

"'Twas something of a lying tale, maybe, that you told," said a man near at hand, and the grin on his face died away when Dan Rodney's fist struck him between the eyes, and Rodney said:

"No man calls Dan Rodney a liar and not pay for it!"

Instead of a grin, there was malice, hatred, a look of vengeance on the man's face, and I registered it in my mind in that instant that Dan Rodney had indeed made an enemy of Henry Treverne by that blow. Little did I think how true I was that day, little did I imagine how far-reaching was to be the effects of that blow, and perhaps 'twere well that I did not know what the future held for us, else, maybe, I had for all my courage have held back from the venture.

I turned away as Treverne went off and looked again towards the *Defiance*, but still the swaying form was absent.

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“Has the Admiral relented, think you?” I asked Rodney, but he shook his head.

“I know not, lad,” he said. “Mayhap ’tis so; I have known Franky Drake do many a thing that would seem foolish to most others.”

It was not until somewhat later that morning that we learned the truth, and it was staggering indeed to Dan and me. There came a boat laden with such things as sailormen in harbor are wont to buy, and the tradesmen in it did say within my hearing:

“Heard ye the tale, my masters? No? Why, that last night Admiral Drake was attacked and——”

“’Tis stale news, an that be it!” said a seaman, one Jack Finch, a very giant of a man at whom I had oft looked and imagined I could see him in a fight of boarders.

“Nay, but ’tis not all,” was the dealer’s reply. “’Tis said that it was intended to hang him at the yardarm this morn, but when the guard would have fetched him for the hanging he was gone, and the irons that had held him lay broken loose, and they do say, masters, that his Excellency the Admiral is sore vexed!”

I moved me away and walked off with Dan Rodney.

“If the Admiral is any more vexed than I am, aye, or afraid more,” my comrade said, “he’s in sorry plight. I had thought we had seen the last of that man, and now we, you and I, have got to keep close watch on ourselves lest we be taken unawares during the weeks that follow. Lad, ’tis a good thing, indeed,

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that the Admiral did take that copy of the chart. Also, methinks 'twere well that you had one too and——”

“Friend,” I said quickly, but quietly, “I have it already!”

Dan Rodney stood stock-still and stared at me, and I laughed up at his bearded face.

“Nay, Dan,” I told him, “look not at me so. I have not played you any trick and spied on ye while ye slept! Mind ye not that last e'en I did copy it for the Admiral?”

“But——” he began, only I cut him off quickly.

“'Twas then that I took a copy for myself,” I said. “'Tis graven as deep in my mind as 'tis on your chest—aye, deeper, perhaps!”

“The mind's not over a safe place to trust,” he said soberly. “But, an you feel satisfied, 'tis well. And 'tis true that the fewer copies that can be read by eyes the better. Mayhap that villain,” he turned him to the other subject again, “will be found. Leastwise, we must possess our souls in patience and see what is done about it.”

What was done about it was this. That very day a boat came alongside the *Roaming Death* and a man delivered a sealed letter to Dan Rodney. He knew not whence it had come, only that it had been given him on the shore with instructions where to deliver it. And when Dan opened it he found that 'twas a note from Drake himself telling him of the escape of Don Enri-

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quez, and that everything possible would be done to find the man. Meantime, the note went on: we were to keep good watch and guard, especially if we went ashore.

Now, since 'twas to be many weeks—and, as it turned out, as you may find, my masters, if you will read the printed broadsheets, months—ere we should set sail for the Main, it was not to be expected that all the men of all the ships gathered at Plymouth should remain aboard without break; and so it came about that a month after entering the Sound, during which time much work had been done to the *Roaming Death*, Dan Rodney and I found ourselves ashore at Southampton whither the *Roaming Death* had been sent by Drake to press men for the great adventure brewing. During that month naught had been heard of Don Enriquez and, to tell the truth, I, for my part, had nigh forgotten that he ever existed. If I did think of him, it was rather as of a dead man, a man drowned by the weight of parts of the irons that he could not get rid of when he had left the *Defiance*. Also, Dan Rodney never mentioned him, and in truth we were like all the rest of the men aboard the *Roaming Death*—sailors chafing like dogs on leash to be released for the sport.

It was, therefore, something of relief to be sent, as we were, on our mission, and Captain Larby did acquiesce in Dan's request that we two should be allowed to try our hands at recruiting men.

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Which does account for the fact that we were one day towards the middle of June sitting us in a tavern kitchen, and Dan Rodney pouring into the ears of sea-worn sailors tales of the golden west—and that to men who had never been, despite their many years aboard, farther than Ireland. Ho, ho, it was good work Dan Rodney did that day, for by the time that we returned to shipboard, we had no less than six men in train, and every one of them hale men and hearty, and fellows, as you would say, who could give account of themselves in fight.

One man only there was professed knowledge of the Main, and he one named Jack Garrish, and he showed scars which he vowed had been won on the Main itself, and Dan, by questions of many kinds, proved the man to be no liar. Of this man Garrish would I speak more fully, since he plays not a little part in the rest that follows. So I would have you know that his face—what you could see of it—since it was smothered nigh all over with beard, and not the trimmed, close-cropped beard of most men, but full sized—his face I say was tanned by wind and sun till it was nigh black. And over one eye, the right, he wore a patch because, as he said, the eye was given to constant twitching in th' light—the which patch had made me stare at him when he first entered the tavern just after Dan and I had walked in. A well built man, he yet had gentle tongue, and 'tis strange how a man will notice little things, his hands were not worn and hard as might have

been expected in one who had sailed so long before the mast as Garrish swore he had.

“A man should take somewhat of pride in himself, even though he be a common sailor,” he had said to Dan when my comrade had twitted him on his “woman’s fingers”; and, indeed, I did agree in that. Also, it was plain that Garrish took care not merely of his hands, but also of his clothes, which were clean and well made, so that when at last he stood on the deck of the *Roaming Death* he was one to be singled out from the rest, as indeed he was by Captain Larby.

“Ho, there, my man!” the captain sang out. “You look not too much of a sailorman, nor one who might want to be!”

“Sir,” put in Master Garrish, “therein, an it please you, is a mistake, as this man”—pointing to Rodney—“can assure you, since he have proved me. I have sailed on many seas and seen more than once the Main!”

“Then you’ll see it again!” roared Larby, who liked a man who spoke out straight. “Art any good at a gun?”

“Aye, even at a gun,” was the reply.

Forthwith Larby did appoint Garrish to the gun’s crew of which Rodney was mate. Thus it was that the lines of our lives—Rodney’s, Garrish’s and my own—fell together. And I will say that although in many ways Garrish was a strange man, given to little conversation, he was of good will, and boasted of his pleas-

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ure at being in such company on such an errand as the expedition was bent.

The *Roaming Death* spent a week or so—well into July—at Southampton and then at Dover, whither she went afterwards, and afterwards sailed back to Plymouth to finish refitting, ready against the day of departure, which day none knew the exactness of.

For myself, the months that I had been aboard the *Roaming Death* had done something, with the aid of Dan Rodney, to make somewhat of a man of me. I had grown stronger of arm and body, my eyes had grown keener, and I do believe that I had added somewhat to my stature—at least, so swore Dan Rodney. Also, I was feeling as though I had come into a heritage of which I had been defrauded hitherto—the sea seemed to belong to me and I to the sea, and that I take it is the right and proper feeling for every Englishman. I know it was right for me; had not my father belonged to the sea before me?

I would not have you think that these weeks and months were spent only in the matter of recruiting. There were other things afoot.

After we came us back from Dover, and while we lay off the Hoe kicking up our heels in idleness—many of the men not so idle as far as pleasure and so on were concerned—there came news that was both startling and surprising. Yet perhaps I ought not to say surprising, for it ought to have been clear to the thickest of heads that such preparations as were in the doing

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could not move apace without the news of it spreading. Truth to tell, there were Spanish emissaries in every port, and the taverns were the frequenting places of these dark-skinned Dons whose wide-open ears and cunning eyes took in everything that passed.

And so, whether distorted or in full truth I know not, news reached Spain—news that there was a fleet fitting: and for an English fleet to be fitting there must be some reason. And what reason but against Spain, either in Europe or—more likely, since 'twas Drake and Hawkins engaged in it—on the far-off Main?

In those days I was not of an age to understand what that must mean, but since then have I learned many things and do know the ways of men and of nations better, so that I can imagine that when some bronzed man breathed his news into Philip's ears there would be much scurrying and much cursing against the Dragon, and, since Spain was by no means a dead nation yet, 'twould be decided in council that such plans were better nipped in the bud.

So do I think me now was what happened there in Spain, as we in England did believe when one day a sloop beat into the Sound of Plymouth—and it was startling news she brought. It happened that Dan Rodney and I were aboard the *Defiance* that morning, being there on some matter of the Flaming Cross that Francis Drake had wanted to know more about, and as we sat us in his state cabin there came a rap on the door.

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“Enter!” bellowed the Admiral, and there came in a man who said that there was a sea captain from Penzance who would have speech with his Excellency.

“He does say, ’tis matter of urgency, sir!” the seaman said, and Drake growled that he might come in forthwith.

Whereupon a man, who must have been waiting on the threshold almost, entered the cabin.

“Your message, sir?” Drake asked briskly. But the newcomer looked from him to us and hesitated.

“Out ye with it, man!” roared the Admiral. “These be trusted friends of mine. What matter is it that has a secret to it?”

“Your Excellency,” the man said, “there be Spaniards down to Penzance!”

“Pish, man!” shouted Drake. “Thou hast been dreaming!”

“Then am I dreaming now, sir!” the man said boldly. “Four galleys laden with soldiers there are at Penzance, or thereabouts, and I did see them beating in towards land, and so I did hurry me here with the warning!”

I looked from the speaker to Drake and saw the Admiral’s eyes draw, as it were, closer together, and his hands clench so that the veins stood out in them.

“Then heaven help those same Dons!” he rapped, getting to his feet. “We’ll trap ’em an they land, and chase them down to Spain an they get away ’fore we can come up with them. My masters”—he turned to

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Dan Rodney and me—"we must leave that matter of ours till later. There be things afoot."

He clanged on a great gong that stood in his cabin, and there came in an officer, to whom Drake gave a number of instructions, one of which fired me, at least, as I heard it, for 'twas nothing less than that amongst the ships that should sail at once for Penzance was the *Roaming Death*. We did salute ourselves out of the cabin, Dan and I, and tumbled overside into our boat, which rowed us across to the *Roaming Death*. We were the bearers of the orders that made Captain Larby swear volubly, seeing that he was about to go ashore for another bout o' drinking.

"A curse on the Spanishers!" he bellowed; but he stamped up on to the poop and roared out commands that sent every man flying to work.

Thus it was that I saw my first sight of preparations for a fight. Bustle there was, and hard work—getting the guns ready and the powder up, dealing out cutlasses and muskets and pistols and what not else of fighting use—so that when we came in sight, as soon we did through carrying every inch of canvas possible, of Penzance, we were all ready. We hove to there and sent ashore to learn what we could, and, finding that the Dons had indeed landed some miles west of the town, we set us off again. I, filled with much excitement, stood on the deck looking westwards, and I do mind me even now the pride I felt when I found voice and shouted:

MY FIRST FIGHT WITH THE DONS

“Masters, I think I do see them—aye, and there be flames an I be not a blind fool!”

No need is there for me to write more about our getting there. We fell on those Dons as they were re-embarking. Our big guns raked them from every quarter as our little squadron tacked about and took up circling positions, our grapeshot flew amongst them, and sails in the hoisting clattered to the decks. The ironed slaves in the Spanish galleys toiled beneath their masters' thongs in the endeavor to get the ships out to sea, and when 'twas done we swooped down on them.

Aye, 'twas a right proper fight, that first one that ever I saw; and when Captain Larby, by seamanship that made me gasp with admiration even in those mad moments, placed the *Roaming Death* alongside a big galley it was at the side of Dan Rodney that I found myself with my father's blade in my hand.

I laughed very merrily at him as we two together dropped on to the decks of the galley. And then I found myself at it. A big, hairy ruffian of a man blazed at me with a pistol, but I knocked it aside by a shrewd thrust at his wrist, and then had him run through.

CHAPTER VI

GARRISH: THE MYSTERY MAN

IT was the first time my blade had bitten deep into flesh, except when I had fought the mystery man in Plymouth and scraped his hand for him, and now 'twas like wine to a sick man. This was no personal quarrel. It was an Englishman's duty, and I withdrew the blade ready for the next man who, leaping over his comrade as he fell to the deck, had at me with a sword which would have mowed my head from my shoulders had it not been for a quick swoop of Dan Rodney's broadsword, which did the severing instead.

After that I remember naught, except that for hours, it seemed, I was fighting, and would have fought on for hours longer had it not been for a surging call of "Boarders, return!"

Whereupon we went back, fighting as we went, to find that a swarm of Dons had actually boarded the *Roaming Death* and were like to have seized the ship.

That they did not was because we hurled them back—by which time, as by a miracle, the three other Spanish vessels had got them away and were being chased down Channel.

As for the rest, I saw it not. A hot searing pain

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caught me in the hip, and I slipped me into a strange sleep, I realized that a ball had found me—and so I knew no more until I found myself between-decks staring up at Dan Rodney and our master surgeon, who fingered something black.

“Heaven save us, Roger,” Dan said, “but I thought you would never awake again.”

“’Twas as well the lad slept so long,” the surgeon said. “It did give chance to get this from him,” and he pitched the black thing to Dan. “’Tis the Spanish ball, lad,” he told me, “that did find you in the last minutes of the fight.”

“Ah, I do remember,” I said weakly, for I do confess that I felt anything but perky. “I’d like that same ball, Dan, please.”

“Ye shall have it, lad,” Rodney told me, and slipped it into my jerkin lying on the floor beside me. Then the surgeon bound me up, and so I lay for days and days in Plymouth Sound, whither, as I had discovered, we had already come, the Spaniards having been fully routed, though not before they had done some considerable damage ashore.

Long weeks I lay about the *Roaming Death* ere I could be free, and by that time plans had gone apace and we were well into August. In fact, it wanted but two days of our sailing when I took my first stroll ashore—the last walk I was to have on English soil for many a month.

Dan Rodney was with me, and Jack Garrish. We

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went to Dan's favorite tavern, and whom should we find there but Francis Drake himself. We'd have known it not had it not been that we heard his voice in a room next where we sat, and I glanced up at Rodney, greatly wondering at the reason for the Admiral's presence in such a low tavern. Dan, for his part, winked at me—and I saw naught. Jack Garrish a few moments later got up from his mug and left the room on some errand, and when he had gone I whispered low to Dan.

"Nay, I know not why he be here," Rodney said in answer to my question. "Whist, what fools some men do be!"

I knew what he meant, for at that moment a man's voice, thick with liquor, had spoken, and the words he said—"Sack the Grand Canary—aye, we will!"—had brought a low growled warning from Drake.

"Thank heaven there be none but us in the room," Rodney said. "And I do think it well that we also go. The less any man knows o' what's afoot, the better. Come, let's find Jack Garrish."

So we went out of the room and ran into Garrish, or, rather, nigh tumbled over him as he stooped low, as if fastening his shoe, which indeed he did tell us was the case. And then we went out, I with a throbbing head as I thought of what the careless words I had heard portended, for they meant that on the way to the Main we were to look in on the Grand Canary and beard the Dons in one of their dens.

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"Why away so soon, friends?" Garrish asked us when we were out of the inn, and Dan told him he'd had enow of drinking that night.

"Then I'll be drinking with myself," Garrish said, laughing, and left us on the instant.

"A strange man, Garrish," I said to Dan when the fellow had gone.

"Aye," Dan agreed. "And yet I liked him at the first. Lad, did'st see that there was a window nigh where he stood that was open into the room where Franky Drake was?"

I had to confess that I had not noticed that, but I knew what was in Dan's mind.

"I do think we should follow him awhile," Rodney said. "Roger, I like not things as they are! I saw something in the eyes of Garrish when that fool with Drake spoke. 'Twas for that I did come out, hoping to get Garrish away. Come on!"

So we turned in time to see Garrish disappear round a corner, and we followed him through endless streets and alleys until we saw him enter a tavern. Now that was not remarkable, I allow, but an the man had wanted liquor there had been many inns he passed 'fore he reached this one, which set us to thinking.

"There be his shadow on the window," Dan said when we were nigh the house. "And—" He stopped speaking, for we were at the window itself, and a voice spoke in what to me was a strange tongue. I looked up at Dan Rodney, and his face was set hard. He laid

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a hand upon my arm, and I kept silence, standing there with him, hearing the low murmur of voices through the slightly opened window but understanding nothing of what was spoken.

Came a moment when Dan drew me away.

"Roger," he said, "'twere an ill thing we did—not bringing our weapons with us."

"Why?" I asked him. "What things did those men speak, and in what tongue?"

"Spanish they spoke," he told me. "That man Garrish knows Spanish as he knows English, and the man he was speaking to is a Spaniard."

"What said they?" I urged, eager to know what was afoot.

"This night, Roger," Dan went on, "there is to be an attempt to blow up the *Defiance* with Drake aboard, since 'tis believed, an those men speak truth, that if Drake should die, then mayhap the expedition will die too!"

"By the Lord Harry!" I cried, even I, not given over-much to strong language. "What will you be doing about it, Dan Rodney, that you hasten away instead of——"

"Tush!" said Dan, laughing at me. "There is no need to go chasing those men. And, besides, there be better things to do and better times. Since we know what's a-doing we can prevent it and, maybe, capture them at the time. Now listen, Roger. That man with Garrish is to send news on the morrow, an the plot fails,

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that the fleet is sailing and that 'tis proposed to call in at the Grand Canary. There is another thing, Roger."

"To wit?" I prompted him.

"Garrish, an the plot fail, is still to accompany us, because—guess it, lad?"

"He knows somewhat of the Flaming Cross!" I exploded, and Rodney nodded to me.

"Aye, 'tis so, lad," he said. "He knows where is the chart!"

"But ye'll not allow him to do that!" I exclaimed.

"Why not?" was the reply. "Since we know what's doing, there's less danger in Garrish going with us than if he stayed away! Don't you see that we shall have him under our eyes? Ah, I see you understand that, Roger! But, to th' other point—to-night, when the moon has gone, there's to be a boat row over to the *Defiance* laden with gunpowder. 'Twill be moored to the ship nigh where the powder magazine is, and a train set so that it shall blow up—and heaven help the *Defiance* an it be not prevented! Come, Roger, we'll get us to that tavern where we did leave the Admiral!"

Needless to say, we hurried, and we were fortunate enough to reach the inn within time to catch the Admiral, upon whom we burst without ceremony, so that he scowled when he saw us.

"What means this?" he demanded, springing to his feet.

"Sir," Dan Rodney said quickly, "we would crave secret word with you on matters of high import!"

"How knew you I was here?" Drake demanded. And Rodney told him plainly what he had heard.

"Faugh!" growled Drake, scowling now at the half-sleeping man nid-nodding on the table between them. "'Tis true indeed that when th' wine's in, the wits are out. Master Scriven, an you can walk straightly, I'll have ye go now."

The man, whom I had never seen before, but whose name I recognized as that of a captain of one of the ships to go with us, got clumsily to his feet and lurched out of the room. And so we found ourselves in the room with Drake.

"Now speak!" said the Admiral, and Dan told him hurriedly what he had learned.

"It seems that you two be very good friends, aye, and protectors of me," said Drake when Rodney had finished. "What time is this plot to be carried out?"

"At ten o' the clock," said Rodney. "And 'twere well that you did not go aboard the *Defiance* this night, sir."

"Pish—I'll go," was the reply. "But 'twill be after we have seized the knaves. Come with me!" Wrapping his cloak about him, he led us from the tavern and to a place that I knew not the name of, but where he found him a number of soldiers, with whom, it now being half-past nine o'clock, we all went down to the shore. We rowed us over towards the *Defiance*, with muffled oars, and came up under the shadow of the tall ship,

where we lay listening to the tramp of the watch, of whom Drake said many strong things that they had not seen us come, and vowed punishment for them on the morrow.

We waited a good while, and then we heard the lowest of sounds, which Dan whispered to me was the scraping of a boat against the side of the ship, whereat a muttered command ran through our boat, which shot from its cover under the stern and went round the ship, crashing full into a boat which our men did not see, so dark was the night although it was August. And as we struck it pistols fired and two white figures leaped from the strange craft into the water, and as they went under there was a terrific crash, as though heaven and earth had met. A great flare of fire leaped into the air, followed by yet another and another. And the light showed me, even in those moments during which our boat was flung like a helpless thing by the force of the explosions, that barrels of powder had exploded. It was afterwards that it was said that the pistol shots had been fired, not at us, but at the barrels at close range to set the powder off.

As for us, when we found that we were still afloat, and while hastily lighted torches flared aboard the *Defiance*, we went hurrying towards the shore, questing those white figures, which we had seen were stark-naked men, Drake himself peering into the gloom and urging on the rowers. But we found them not, those men who had hoped so much from their nefarious plot, and al-

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though many boats put off from other ships in the Sound, no trace of the men was found.

We put back to the *Defiance*, where Drake would have it that Rodney and I should go aboard, since he had somewhat to say unto us. And when we were in his cabin he said:

"My masters, you have done me good service this night, though I had wished that we might catch those rogues."

"I do feel like a fool and a coward that I did not seize Garrish and his friend when I heard them," growled Dan Rodney, "even as the lad would have had me do."

"Nay, not a coward, Master Rodney," said Drake kindly enough. "I do understand what was in your mind. And mayhap we shall get one of them, for did you not say that 'twas agreed amongst them that Garrish should sail when we go?"

"Aye, 'twas so," was the reply. "An he be not too scared!"

"Now list to me," said Drake. "I have a plan."

"To string Master Garrish at the yardarm!" put in Rodney.

I remembered another man who was condemned to that punishment, but escaped in the night. And the remembrance of it brought to me the thought that possibly Enriquez was behind this latest plot. I said as much, and Admiral Drake smiled at me when I spoke.

"Roger Hampsley," he said, "'tis as likely as anything, and 'tis because of that that I have formed my

plan. I would indeed be glad to seize that dog, Enriquez. And here is my plan: naught will we say to Garrish an he goes aboard the *Roaming Death* again. It shall be given for every ship to allow her men, or those of good behavior, to go ashore for the last time an they want to. And if Garrish chooses so to do, he shall go, but there shall be men watching him all the time—two men I have whom I can trust as I trust you.”

“Why not give us that task, sir?” I asked eagerly.

“Nay, Roger, ’twere better not, since Garrish would know you. These men of mine he’ll not know, that much is certain. If Enriquez be in this plot, what more likely than that Garrish should go to see him an it be possible? Describe you the man to me again. You have seen more of him than I have. Hold—I’ll have my two watchdogs in to listen to you!”

So two men, who were introduced to us as Masters Gascoigne and Cooke, were ushered into the cabin, and listened while Dan and I described Garrish as best we could remember. After which we went us to the *Roaming Death*, pleased, in a measure, with what we had done, though distressed at our failure to capture the conspirators.

When we reached our ship we found Jack Garrish there, asleep ’tween-decks, and of course we said never a word to any of our part in the night’s doings. Neither did we ask the next morning to go ashore when leave was announced according to the Admiral’s plan. But

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Garrish went, and Dan smiled at me as the rascal went over the side. We waited throughout the day, wondering what was happening ashore, and never were men more surprised than we when at eventide Garrish came aboard again. And so we were in ignorance of what had taken place until the next morning when Captain Larby, coming from the *Defiance*, where there had been a council of captains, handed Dan Rodney a sealed letter, saying that a man aboard the Admiral's ship had craved the favor of it being brought.

"And so turned me into a letter carrier, Dan Rodney!" Larby said with a laughing growl.

Dan thanked his old shipmate and took the letter, the which he and I read together when opportunity came, and looked at each other wonderingly as we did so. As well we might, for the note was from the Admiral, sent thus to avoid the cackle of tongues. And in it he said that no word was still to be mentioned of Garrish's rascality; but that we were to watch him closely, since, maybe, when we reached the Main he might prove, under pressure, of some value. As for Enriquez, Garrish had not met him when ashore, and so naught had been done to apprehend the traitor.

"'Tis much the same thing as you said, Dan," I suggested after a while. And Dan nodded.

"Aye, lad, 'tis a good plan, too. And we'll watch him as a cat watches a mouse, to be sure. See you that

footnote, lad—that we sail in two days' time, which is the twenty-eighth of the month?"

I had seen it, indeed, and it made me happy, for I was all eagerness to be off. My taste of battle and of intrigue had served to whet my appetite for more—the more that I knew would be waiting for us in the far-off seas.

We kept good watch upon Garrish during the time we were still in the Sound, wondering whether after all he might make attempt to leave the *Roaming Death* ere she sailed. And Dan and I, who slept 'tween-decks with Garrish, took it in turns to keep awake o' nights. But the man made no attempt to leave, and was aboard when the *Roaming Death* left the Sound in the wake of the larger vessels, which, giving salutes of farewell, were answered by cannons from the forts ashore on that twenty-eighth day of August, 1595; and the crews lined the ships' sides, cheering, waving, happy men, on their way to the golden west.

Of that fleet I will but say this: that there were twenty-seven ships, amongst them, as you do know, the *Defiance*, with Admiral Drake aboard her, the *Garland*, commanded by none other than Admiral Hawkins, the *Roaming Death*, but a very small ship of few guns, and—but there, my masters, what will it interest you to know the names of all those vessels? Sufficient to know that on board every one of them were bold, courageous men, bent on wresting from the Dons somewhat of the

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treasures of the Main, as so many had done before them.

Right merry were we all during the weeks that, uneventfully, we took in sailing southwards, Dan and I perhaps more merry than most because we knew that besides the main purpose of the expedition there was that other quest which interested us most. We were out to seek for the Flaming Cross, and had we not the word of Francis Drake that when we reached the Main he would spare time and men to help us in the search?

I have said that those weeks were uneventful, but there was one thing that happened which served to interest me, at any rate, though I doubt not that it seemed but a minor thing to most others aboard the ships, who thought life little enough entertaining and would have liked much to have done business on the coast of Spain. The which Drake and Hawkins would have none of, being of a mind to keep their purpose secret as long as possible, though methinks that the Dons knew quite enough as it was. For a month naught happened, and then on October the eighth we raised two low-lying ships in the distance, and on the signal from the flagship did the *Roaming Death* go chasing after them.

"Flyboats they be, and Flemish at that, lad," Dan Rodney said to me. "Franky Drake would have us get news of them an it be there to get!"

"Think you they'll put up a fight?" I asked of him, but he grinned at me as he said:

“Never a finger, lad. We be carrying too many guns for Dutchmen to bark at us.”

In which Dan Rodney proved wrong, for when we came within gunshot distance and sent a ball or two flying over the boats, to bid them heave to, they saucily answered us in kind, whereat Captain Larby grew somewhat angry.

“Bring down the sails of one of ’em!” he roared, and as it fell out it was our gun—Dan Rodney’s, that is—that had had the work to do. Now I had been putting in some practice under direction of Rodney, and, since this was but small fry, I had little difficulty in getting permission to fire the shot.

“Take your time, lad!” Dan said. “Let’s see what I’ve taught ye!”

I took my aim with wondrous care and with not a little trembling—trembling that left me when the touch-light jabbed at the powder and the ball screamed out of the cannon’s mouth; and a cry of joy went up from our men as the mainsail of the highest flyboat toppled out-board.

“Well shot, lad!” roared Dan Rodney. “’Twill show ’em we’re in earnest!”

We loaded up again while the *Roaming Death* went sweeping forward, but there was no need for further shooting. Both boats hauled to. We came up with them at last and bellowed for their commanders to come aboard.

The which they did in fear and trembling, and Master

Larby did question them in such a way that had I been one of them I do think I would have knocked him down on his own deck. But such questioning had its effect, for those two Flemings, cringing 'fore Larby, told all he wanted to know—that we should meet no Spanish vessels an we did not go into harbor to find them, but that 'twas known very well in Spain that we were out, and 'twas believed we were thinking less of Spain than of the Main. And one other thing, too—to wit, that the news had gone forth that we had some designs on the Grand Canary.

“By the singed beard of Philip!” roared Larby, “ ’twill be a bad knock for Franky Drake when he hears that! Here, get you gone overside now, and know this: that an you meet a Don tell him there’s no sacking of the Canary. There be bigger fish than that to fry!”

Whereat you may assure yourself that Larby was not altogether sober at that moment, otherwise he would not have confirmed the news in one breath and contradicted it in another. However, those Flemings swore a great oath that they would do as they were bid, and very glad I could see they were when they dropped into their boats and were rowed over to their vessels.

As for us, we tacked about to allow the main fleet to catch up with us, and then Larby went aboard the *Defiance*. There was a bad to do there, as I do know, who went with the captain. Hawkins was there from the *Garland*, for it seems there had been somewhat of a council, and to Drake and Hawkins and their officers

gathered in Drake's state cabin Larby told what he had learned.

" 'Tis as I have said!" Hawkins banged the table as he spoke, until the bowls rang and the liquor was spilled. " 'Tis but wasting time and running risk we need not do to venture to the Grand Canary. The Dons will be ready for us. We'll stand no more chance of landing than we would in reaching Madrid and——"

"An I had Madrid as an object, I'd go there!" roared Drake, and I loved him for it. " 'Tis the Grand Canary we'll make for, no matter whether the Dons know or not!"

Then they fell to much more of argument, but in the end it was Drake who prevailed; and when we went back to the *Roaming Death* it was with the knowledge that there was work to be soon doing, long before we reached the Main.

It was not till then, I'll have you know, that the crews had known of the project to raid the Grand Canary, and when the word was given there was much rejoicing amongst them.

When we were but a few days' sail from the islands much work of preparation was begun and carried on. Drake had laid his plans and issued orders that every ship should supply its complement of men to make up the fourteen hundred who were to form the landing party. And I tell you that my heart throbbed at the thought of the coming work, and I spoke heatedly, almost fiercely, to Dan Rodney on the matter.

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“Friend,” I said, “an it be possible, speak you to the captain that I go with the attack!”

Whereat Dan Rodney laughed hugely.

“ ’Tis already done!” he told me. “I knew that you would want it, and so I arranged it. I go with you, too! ’Twill be your baptism of fire, lad.”

I wrung his hand for thanks, and prepared me forthwith. I took my father’s cutlass down to the armorer and saw that its edge was keened; I saw to it that I got a rare good pistol, and as for a musketoon, I left the choice of that to Dan Rodney, who wheedled round the armorer to good purpose on my behalf.

And thus gayly armed I waited impatiently.

CHAPTER VII

AN EARLY REBUFF

I SLEPT not the night before the morning on which we made the Grand Canary, October 16, but strode the deck beneath the star-splashed heavens. The blood of my father surged through my veins. I wanted to pay back for him some of the debt he owed the Dons for their treatment of him in the years gone by.

Thus did I pass the night, knowing that within easy distance was the island that the morrow would see us attempting to land upon.

“Roger,” Dan Rodney whispered to me, “you should sleep. The morning will need fresh men!”

“Nay, I cannot sleep,” I told him. “For, friend of mine——”

I stopped speaking, for at that moment there was a sudden glare from the forepart of the *Roaming Death*, which, I would have you know, had till that moment been in total darkness, like every other of the vessels of the fleet.

Dan Rodney laid a hand upon my arm for silence, and next instant he and I together were racing towards the forepart. But before we reached it other men were running thither, and when we arrived it was to find a

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shattered keg, in which, so the smell told us, there had been gunpowder.

“There’s a traitor aboard!” some one shouted, and at the words the thought came to me, as it did to Dan, and we worked our way from the crowd and hurried below, questing Jack Garrish—the man we knew to be a traitor.

As Dan Rodney and I tumbled down the hatchway, questing for Jack Garrish, the thought rioted through our minds that we should quite easily discover that Garrish was the man who had played so treacherously in the matter of giving a signal to the Dons on the far-off shore. Such great care had been taken that the ships should come within sight of the island under the screen of darkness, and lie there, lightless all of them, until the moment came for the landing to take place. And now the Spaniards must know we were there, and they would hasten forward with their preparations of defense—and, in any case, we had lost whatever advantage we might have had from a surprise attack. It was disturbing and aggravating, to say the least; and I, for one, whatever Dan might be thinking, had it in my mind to condemn myself for carelessness in not having better carried out the duty of watching Garrish.

I gripped my cutlass as I ran, though I had an idea that I might not need to use it yet, since I doubted me that Garrish would be in his place.

In which, my masters, I proved wrong. For when we came within decks, where the band of us was wont

to live, it was to see, by the dim gleam of a ship's lantern, Jack Garrish lying fast asleep.

Dan laid a hand on my arm, as though to restrain me; and as we stood there the sounds of the men above served to awaken those below, who sprang to their feet, Jack Garrish amongst them.

"What's adoing?" voices asked, but neither Dan nor I, who took my cue from him, said aught, letting it be supposed that we had ourselves been aroused by the clamor above. And there was no time for any to say, even if they knew, for at that moment the call was piped of "Landing party on deck!" and those of us who had been chosen went up to the deck, Dan and I and Garrish amongst them.

"Think you the rogue was shamming, Dan?" I asked as we walked together.

"Likely enow," said Dan. "But 'tis neither here nor there now. Roger, in this business that is about to begin, see to it that you haunt my footsteps. You be light-hearted and young and eager, but, lad, 'tis not a pleasure time, that of fighting the Dons, who, though we hate them, be not cowards, but brave men and sturdy."

"Thanks, Dan," I said a little chokingly, for I read the tones of the man and knew that he was anxious for me.

But I had little time to be anxious about myself, for, once on deck and gathered to listen to Captain Larby, we learned that since the fire signal by the traitor, who,

despite the search made for him, had not been discovered—Dan refused to step forward and lay information against Garrish, whom even now he did not wish to know that we were aware of his treachery—a signal had come from the Admiral's ship ordering the landing parties to get ready, and for a number of the ships, the *Roaming Death* amongst them, to go towards the shore and bombard the beach to cover the landing operations.

Thus it was that, every man being served out with weapons and ammunition, the *Roaming Death* moved inshore and, with the pearly dawn lighting the heavens, came within gunshot.

Judge of our surprise—that is, of the surprise of those who had not known what Dan and I knew, that the Spaniards were aware this long time of our intentions—when it was seen that trenches had been cut and earthworks thrown up beyond the beach, and these were filled with soldiers, pikemen and musketeers, while behind them rode horsemen, armed and armor clad, with gun mouths poking aggressively seawards. Shots flew from these latter and whined amongst the sails in rare numbers that made us realize how difficult was the work in hand.

But the covering ships essayed the task of dislodging the defenders, and our guns roared challenges the while a number of our boats set off for the shore—only to be raked with shot as they neared the beach and being forced to withdraw. Time and again was this work tried, only to be given up, so that, after much bombard-

ing which did in truth some damage to the enemy, it was decided that 'twere best to draw off and report to the Admirals the position of things.

Captain Larby it was who went to the *Defiance* with the news; and he went there in the boat in which Dan and I were posted, waiting to be rowed to the shore, but never going there.

And I saw the look of triumph in the eyes of Jack Garrish, in the boat with us, when Captain Larby re-entered the boat and said something about Admiral Drake being sore distressed at affairs, and was going himself to the shore to make an inspection.

"Though I do think there'll be no landing made here!" Larby growled.

I looked behind and saw a boat being lowered from the *Defiance*, and saw Admiral Drake enter it. Whereupon, the signals having been given, the covering ships, and some additional ones with them, went inshore again and smothered the beach with gunfire while the Admiral made his inspection.

But when Drake, having finished his examination, returned to the *Defiance* and sent the news around that the ships were to sail away, as no landing was to be attempted, there were murmurs and grumblings.

Jack Garrish was loudest among these, a wet blanket in very truth, the kind of man who might do no little harm amongst a crew.

I saw Dan's eyes glint and half-close, and his lips press tightly together, and once or twice I saw his hand

grope for his sword as Jack Garrish held forth to the crew between-decks while the ship was forcing her way through a tumultuous sea, in company with the others, making for the western extremity of the island, where it was intended to water.

"Fie!" he said, loud-mouthed. "Has Franky Drake lost his magic? Would to heaven I'd never come on this voyage, which looks fair to end with us all in a Spanish prison!"

"Art white-livered already, man?" Dan Rodney demanded.

And I do tell you that there was a look in Garrish's eyes that I did not like. It was gone in a moment, however, and he was the same casual, smooth-faced man as ever, with a smile about his mouth despite his lugubrious demeanor a moment before.

"Nay, not white-livered, but of a mind that likes not the look o' things!" he said. And I could see, looking around at the men, that his words found an echo in many minds. "Bah—while Drake and Hawkins quarrel 'mongst themselves——"

"Who told you that?" demanded Rodney like a shot.

He was towering over Garrish, into whose eyes came that look of hatred that I was hard put to account for. And the man lost his temper at Dan's threatening attitude. His hand shot out, and the clenched fist caught Dan on the chin, sending my comrade staggering back. Next instant, however, he had steadied himself and was upon the smiling man, fellows scattering away to

allow them room as they fell to. Aye, masters, that was a bonny fight indeed. Dan knew how to use his fists as well as he did a sword, and he gave Garrish no time to get at his weapon, being bent, as I could see, to avoid bloodshed, and only desirous of administering a thrashing that should make Garrish keep his ominous opinions to himself. Garrish, too, filled, for some reason I could not fathom, with hatred of Rodney, with whom hitherto he had been friendly, even comradely, fought hard and well, but was no match for Dan, who punished him dreadfully, fighting as fairly as any man ever fought. Not so Garrish, for there came a moment when, after a crack from the sweeping fist of my comrade, he pulled himself together and sprang—and I, whose eyes had been fixed upon him, saw a glittering steel in his hand.

“ ’Ware, Dan!” I cried, and sprang in as I spoke with my cutlass drawn. I used that cutlass as a man might a hatchet, and the two steels met, Garrish’s flying from his hand. And next instant Dan had given him a blow on the chin point that sent him dropping to the deck, where he lay still and strangely quiet.

We left Garrish lying there, I tell you, and went our ways up on to deck. The bos’n’s whistle shrilled, calling us to quarters, we not knowing what was afoot and not at all to have been surprised had it proved that we were to engage an enemy or two. Yet when we got to deck we found that ’twas only a case of boats out to water the ships, which were now nearing the western end of

the Grand Canary. But for the moment there were sad things to worry the minds of us aboard the *Roaming Death*.

Full-hearted we worked at getting the boats out and rowed us across to inhospitable land, with butts all ready for the water we sorely needed by now. But when the first boat from the *Roaming Death* was within range of the shore, being the leading craft of all, there were sounds of firing, and the water about us was spattered up by balls falling—and we knew that we should have to fight for the water we needed, and that at a place where we had least expected to do so, for the spot was far away from the haunts of men, or so 'twas thought. We could see no one, and had expected that landing would be opposed by hidden soldiers.

“Go ahead—pull, men!” roared Larby, who was in the boat with us.

Another voice—that of Captain Grimston of the *Solomon*, riding abreast of us—shouted out a like order, so that the *Solomon's* boat and ours began a race for the first to land. We won—through a storm of shot which took somewhat of a toll amongst us. Yet we went on, springing ashore a few moments before the *Solomons*. Then we joined forces and went sweeping together towards the rocks and bowlders whence we knew the firing had come. And as we went more shots fell amongst us, and then, like rabbits scurrying before dogs, scores of wild-looking men went rushing from their hiding places.

“Herdsmen they be!” panted Dan Rodney, who had been to the Canary before and knew what manner of folk lived in these remote places. “’Tis easier work than fighting soldiers, lad!”

So I thought then, though I knew better soon. A few of those men went down before our own firing, but the main body of them managed to get away up a steep and rugged hill, and so disappeared from view as though they had dived them into caves.

Gathered at the foot of the hill, Grimston and Larby held council, and decided to storm the position, if only to keep the enemy engaged while the rest of the ships’ boats landed and took in water.

“Fool’s game,” muttered Dan Rodney in my ear.

No one else heard him, and Dan himself was right amongst the first to begin to clamber up the hill, I hard upon his heels. No easy task was that, what with shifting stones and crumbling earth, and pattering balls from the enemy. Yet we managed, some of us, to get to the top, which we found to be level and good fighting ground. Well, in a manner, it was for us that ’twas so, else we had all been killed without a dog’s chance. Even so, it was grim work, and strange, for—ill-content with fighting fairly as men to men—those Spanish herdsman, finding that they could no longer lie hidden, called up strange allies to their aid; and as we fought them, with cutlass and sword and hook, there came yelping and baying into the mêlée scores of great hounds.

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Heaven, how we fought! Better armed though we were than the herdsmen, who had long heavy staves as well as guns—the latter they could not use now that we were hand to hand—we suffered ill at their hands. I saw Grimston go down to earth beneath a blow that must have cracked his skull, for he lay there still, never moving—and the tide of the fight went over him again and again. Others, too, suffered a like fate, and I saw Dan Rodney stagger back as a stave smashed into his face. I sprang to his side, cutting down the Spaniard who had struck him—but not before another man had stuck me with a knife from behind. A dog snarled at my feet and sprang. I drove my short-held cutlass and the brute dropped before me, a Don falling over him and clawing at my ankles. The hands that gripped me sent me sprawling too. Dan it was who, with a muffled bellow of a roar, saved my life, I do believe, for in another moment one of those dogs would have had me had not Rodney slashed him fair across the back with his big sword.

Yet, though we were so badly mauled, I would have you know that those Spaniards suffered not a little—in truth, they had such ill-handling that they were fain to call off their hounds and get them scurrying down t'other side o' the hill.

“Back to th' shore, men!” cried Larby, who was now in command of both crews. “’Tis no good following those rascals. Methinks they’ve had enough, too, and will worry us no more!”

CHAPTER VIII

THE END OF THE "ROAMING DEATH"

BUT Larby's thought was a wrong one, for those herdsmen, seeing that we were going, took heart of courage and followed us, craftily, carefully, so that ever and anon we had to stop and face them and drive them back. Right down to the bottom they came after us, little caring, so it seemed, for the fact that there were scores of more men below to tackle them. Their dogs were with them, and they were worse foes than the men themselves. How we got to the bottom I cannot tell you, but we did so, with the herdsmen actually hanging on to our heels to the very water's edge; for by ill-luck the other boats were far off and, so it would seem, had received instructions to proceed with their watering.

And then a strange thing happened—a thing that made us gasp with astonishment and fear, as you may well understand when you know what I am now about to write.

When we were at the bottom of the hill at last, we saw a boat put off from the *Roaming Death*, a boat filled with men, whom we doubted not were being sent to our assistance, and we took courage from the fact.

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The ship was riding at anchor some distance from the shore, well within gunshot, but unable to help us—as we were mixed up so closely to the enemy—lest her shots kill us as well as the herdsmen and dogs. When we saw the boat coming we turned our backs to the shore and fought our way backwards foot by foot, the herdsmen courageously following us, knowing, as they did, that when they wished they could race for the shelter of their hills and caves. It was when we were halfway from the hill-foot to the beach that the startling thing happened. There was a terrific crash and a blaze of light that blinded the eyes even in the daylight, the air was filled with hurtling things—and those of us who could for our preoccupation turn, did so, and saw that the *Roaming Death* was no longer riding at anchor. She had disappeared—at least, what was visible of her must have been that flying debris and wreckage that was descending on sea and land over many and many a yard's radius.

“The ship has blown up!” roared Dan Rodney, while Captain Larby mouthed an imprecation that was cut short by a great stone that caught him full in the face and sent him a corpse to the ground. The herdsmen, astonished no less than we ourselves, had for a moment ceased fighting; but, realizing that whatever had happened was in their favor, they came with renewed vigor, and we were hard put to it to preserve ourselves. Indeed, it was only the arrival of the boatload of men from the ship that saved us, for, landing, they raced to

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our aid; and the herdsmen, realizing that they were likely to suffer no small damage at the hands of fresh, untired men, took to their heels and ran, calling their hounds after them.

And so those of us who still lived found ourselves binding up wounds, as best we could, and chattering about the catastrophe that had happened.

"Treachery!" said Dan Rodney to me.

"And treachery means Jack Garrish!" I said, looking about to see if the man were amongst those who had come off in the boat just before the explosion.

And, sure enough, Jack Garrish was there amongst the newcomers from the poor old *Roaming Death*.

Dan Rodney made a spring towards him. Garrish had his back turned and did not see the movement; but next moment there was something else to think about, for a pattering hail of shot came from the hill—and then sounded the clatter of hoofs. We swung round as one man, and, having most of us reloaded our pieces, we fired at the troop of armored horsemen who were charging at us from round the hill.

Many of them went down with their horses, and there was no little confusion, 'midst which we made for our boats and somehow scrambled in. Some there were who did not get in, being wounded and killed and falling into the sea, but the rest of us got in and rowed away towards the nearest ship, which was, as I did notice, a caravel of the name of the *Francis*.

We got us aboard, and by this time the watering had

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been done and the ships were weighing anchor, so that presently we were at sea, sadder men and some of us not a little worried lest there might be some truth in the opinion of Jack Garrish, and men like him, that the voyage was doomed to disaster.

Soon after we were out of sight of Grand Canary the *Francis* was ordered to send every man from the *Roaming Death* across to the *Defiance*, and when we arrived there we were gathered, all of us, on the deck, and Francis Drake put many questions to us, first as to the signal in the night and secondly as to the explosion that had brought destruction to the *Roaming Death*.

Now long ere the message came from the *Defiance* Dan Rodney and I had spoken on these matters—and we had watched Jack Garrish closely, too. That it was he who had done both things we had little doubt, but there was nothing to prove it, and we, not wishing to let the others of our comrades into our secrets, had done naught in the way of asking questions which might have brought to light things that had been seen.

“Nay, lad, we’ll leave that to others. There’ll be questions asked of a surety, and ’twere better that we still seemed ignorant, since the Admiral has ordered it that we let Garrish alone lest he be of use to us when we reach the Main.”

So we had waited—and then found ourselves aboard the *Defiance*, no more than twenty of us, sole survivors of the crew of the *Roaming Death*. But spite of much questioning and not a little bullying—for I’ll have you

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know that Francis Drake was a hard man an he liked! —naught was brought to light, so that the Admiral, in a terrible rage, swore he'd keep us all in irons and without food until some one confessed.

"Faith!" he cried. "One o' you must be the man—'tis not like a traitor to stay aboard the ship that he blows up! He makes his 'scape, generally!"

"Your Excellency," put in Amos Breton, who had been first officer on the *Roaming Death*, and the only officer left alive of all of them, "I am willing to stay and take the punishment that you decree, since I'll not desert my men, an it please you. And, faith, it is not to my liking that there should be a traitor amongst us; neither is it in my mind that the traitor will speak till forced to by some means. Such men are aye stubborn. Natheless, there do be this to remember—that an there were a traitor, he might have made his escape during the fight ashore, or mayhap have been killed there."

"You're o'er-windy, Master Breton," said Drake with a smile. "But there be some measure o' sense in what you say. Natheless, 'tis into irons that ye all go to see what hunger and thirst 'll do."

So we were all driven below-decks and ironed in dark holes, not all together, but in twos.

"Dan," I said to Rodney, who was my companion—I had managed, without any difficulty, to get the jailer to have us two together—"I'm not liking the idea of starving here until some one confesses. 'Tis a fool's

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idea, to my mind! If Garrish did not do those two foul deeds, of a certainty we'll all die!"

"Aye, and so we shall if he did!" was the grim reply. "Garrish 'll never confess. But I've a mind that there be something more in't than seems to the eye, lad!"

Whatever it was that Dan believed, he did not enlighten me, and we lay there all during that day. 'Twas the longest day that ever I lived through, I do think, what with the growing hunger and the thirst, and the dark foulness of our prison. I hated the irons about my wrists and legs. I hated everything and every one, and, as Dan Rodney told me afterwards, there came the time towards night when, growing light of head, I shouted my hatred of the Admiral himself who could have thrown into captivity two men who, at least, he must have known had had no part or lot in the treacherous matters.

I must have gone off into unconsciousness, for I remember naught, after a wild hopeless struggle with my irons, until I awoke to the feel of burning spirit in my throat and saw Dan Rodney bending over me with a lantern held close.

"Lad, lad, I thought ye would never come round," Dan said, with a gulp. "Does that feel better?"

I struggled to a sitting posture, and my gathering wits told me that no longer were the irons upon me; and I remembered things.

"Water!" I said. And never was man more grateful than I for the beaker of drink, cool and refreshing, that

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was given me by a man whose face I did not see until that moment, and then knew that 'twas Francis Drake himself.

"Faith, Roger," the Admiral said, "you'll be thinking me no good friend of yours, eh, to bring you to this?"

At the sound of his voice, and at his words, I had a glimmering of the things that I had thought in my half madness, and flushed at the remembrance. Also I knew by the kindly tone in his voice that he had some feeling that certainly was not anger.

"Sir," I said simply, "I did think ill of you, but beg forgiveness. A man thinks many things when he's half mad with thirst."

With that he stooped and lifted me to my feet, supporting me out of the foul hole and up the companion-way until we reached his own state cabin, where he and Dan entered with me; and the door was fast closed behind us.

I tell you, my masters, that I was in paradise then, for the table was spread with food and drink, to which, at the Admiral's invitation, Dan and I fell with a hearty will, and did ourselves so well that Drake laughed at us and warned us that 'twas not good for men with so empty stomachs to fill themselves! Natheless, fill we did, and enjoyed it, without any ill-effects, except a sleepiness that came over me, but which was soon gone when the Admiral started to speak. For the news that he had was startling enough.

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"We've found the traitor," he said shortly, and I started to my feet.

"How so—and who?" I demanded. "'Tis Garrish, I'll warrant me!"

"Nay, but you're wrong, lad," Drake told me, and then proceeded to explain to our astonished ears what had happened. It appeared that the Admiral had, like Dan and me, suspected that the culprit was Garrish; but, because he did not wish to reveal his hand in the game lest it should after all be some other rascal, he had had all of us thrown into irons, hoping that Garrish, an it were he at the bottom of matters, would admit his crimes. Now and again, as I myself did know, the jailers had looked in to see that the prisoners were all right and to question them as to their intentions. And at last, going to that part of the hold where Garrish and his companion in durance were confined, one of the jailers had discovered Garrish lying with his skull cracked and broken irons beside him. But of the other prisoner there was no sign, and when after a while Garrish recovered his senses he swore that the other man had produced a file and cut through his irons, promising Garrish to do the same to his if he kept silence. The which Garrish did, and then, so his tale ran, the man, having freed himself, brought his irons down on Garrish's skull, knocking him senseless.

"And, by my beard!" exclaimed Drake at the finish, "that other man, whom Garrish says the name of was Trenden——"

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"I know him—a crafty, cunning rogue!" put in Dan Rodney. "Though I ne'er thought him a traitor!"

"Yet such he was," said Drake, "for while he worked at the irons, so Garrish said, he vowed that 'twas he who had given the signal and fired the ship! And he is gone—in one o' the starboard boats. There's a man o' the watch lying half dead, stabbed ere the villain went!"

"A strange tale, sir," said Dan Rodney. "How came the man able to leave the prison hold?"

"Like as you might have done, Master Rodney!" said Drake, with a short laugh. "'Twas thought no need to lock 'em in, seeing that their irons were bolted down! As you say, 'tis a strange tale—passing strange, indeed."

"Think you, sir," I hazarded, "that Garrish and Trenden were plotters together, and did fall out? Might it not be that they agreed to leave together, and Trenden, thinking it easier for one to slip past the watch than two, did clout Garrish over th' head so that he should not give the alarm on being left alone, betrayed by his own fellow rogue?"

"Roger, I never thought on't," the Admiral confessed. "And 'tis not at all an unlikely thing. But, even an it be so, we'll let it pass, for I have it still in my mind that we'll find some use for Master Garrish, who, since he is in the service of the Dons, may know somewhat of their plans against us. And to that end we'll save him—aye, we'll save him till we're ready for him."

So 'tis back to the *Francis* ye shall all go, him with you."

"An it please you——" Dan began, but the Admiral cut him short by going over to the locker wherein I had seen him, many months ago, place the copy of the chart drawn from the one scratched on Dan's chest. and when he came again to us he had it in his hand. He spread it out on the table before us and pointed to the star mark that told of the place where had been hidden the Cross of Santa Marta.

"Explain to me, Master Rodney," he asked, "the route from Santa Marta and so up to that spot. Mayhap it will save time and trouble some day. Who knows? The hazards of war are many. Faith, but sometimes I do think it were best that you stayed here on the *Defiance* with me, and but that I do want you to keep watch on Garrish it should be so. But him I am afraid to have aboard, lest his prying eyes and listening ears learn something that it were not wise that he should know. But come you with the explanation, Master Rodney."

Thereupon Dan proceeded to give such information as was wanted, the which Drake scrawled down on the back of the rough chart, I listening awhile and drinking in every word that was spoken, so that, even as I had that chart graven upon my mind, so I had all the rest of the matter written there against the time when it might be useful.

And while the speaking was going on I heard a sound

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above and glanced up at the light in the cabin ceil, but saw nothing. A while later—why, who shall tell?—I looked again. And as I did so I, breathless with surprise, clutched the arm of the carved chair in which I sat—a trophy from some sacked mansion on the Main, as I knew—and then opened my mouth to cry aloud. But ere I could do so the vision that I had seen had died away. And when Drake, looking up from his task, saw me with my mouth opened and my eyes staring, foolish-like I doubt not, at the opening above, he cried:

"What ails you, lad? You look as though you've seen a ghost!"

I recovered myself with a start and sprang to my feet, making for the door as I did so.

"'Twas no ghost, but a being of flesh and blood!" I exclaimed. "I saw the face of a man there of a surety, and he was listening!"

At my words both Dan Rodney and Francis Drake sprang to their feet and dashed after me to the door, the Admiral grasping me by the arm and swinging me round to face him.

"What mad words are these you're saying, Roger?" he demanded.

I told him in more leisured manner what I had seen, whereupon he flung open the door and the three of us went scampering like schoolboys up the steps to the deck. It could not have been more than two minutes from the time the man's head had disappeared to the time when we stood at the edge of the light over the

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cabin, and we had gone as silently as men can in a hurry such as we were ; but the man had disappeared. Drake moved round the edge of the opening, calling for the sentry who should have been there, and, doing so, nigh stumbled flat to the deck, tripped by something that in the darkness none of us had seen ; and then going down on his knees he peered at whatever it was, at the same time calling in a loud voice for a lanthorn.

At his words there came running feet, and a light appeared, and when he who carried it reached us and threw the beams they revealed to our astonished sight a man lying with a knife in his back.

CHAPTER IX

A FIGHT IN THE BELLYING SAIL

WE stood, amazed and bemused, staring down at the man, whose face—although he was not dead, and whom the surgeon did keep alive—looked ghastly in the yellow light from the lanthorn—and for my part, a cold shiver ran down my back. I knew that I was looking down upon the work of a desperate villain—I knew that I was seeing the work of the man, whoever he might be, whom I had seen peering into the cabin; and as I thought thus I remembered what, in my excitement, I had forgotten to tell.

“Who——” I heard, as through a muffling cloak, the voice of Admiral Drake begin to speak, and at the instant I stepped forward.

“Sir,” I said tremblingly, “the man who did that was Trenden, he who escaped but a while ago!”

Drake swung round on me.

“How know you that, boy?” he demanded. “The man went with the boat that was cut adrift.”

“Then there be his double aboard, sir,” I told him. “For the face that I saw was, by token of the scar from his right eye to his chin, the face of Trenden, unless there be another man with such a scar aboard.”

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"Search the ship! Search the ship!" roared out Drake at that, and soon the vessel was ablaze with lanterns, and great flares shot up into the night.

For hours the hunt went on, until the dawn broke in red glory, and never a sign was found of the man sought. Every hold was searched, and still we found not Trenden, so that at last, weary men all of us, we gave up the hunt and did decide that he had chosen a watery end rather than suffer at the hands of justice, and swing at the yardarm.

"Dan," I said, when at last we came again to the upper deck and I had filled my lungs with God's fresh air that was like tonic from a surgeon's chest, "Dan, I do be out in deep waters in all this matter! First Enriquez seeking the chart you carry, then Garrish, and then this other man. Truly, 'tis a maze of wonder to me!"

"Roger, my lad," he told me slowly, "an you live with the sea as long as I have, and mix you in affairs with the Dons as often, you'll cease to wonder at aught that happens. Those same Dons be cunning as snakes and rich as the Indies, so that they can buy even Englishmen to do their dirty work—as you have seen already! If——" He broke off abruptly, then speaking again: "Lad, there be a storm brewing, an I know my weather."

He looked up at the bellying sails as he spoke, and, doing so, threw up a hand towards a mast, I following the direction. And when his voice roared out some-

thing it was almost lost in mine, as I, too, cried aloud. And when he sprang for the lines I was hard at his heels, with scores of men down on deck looking at us, wondering, I doubt not, what mad thing had taken us.

Mad, did I say? Nay, not mad, unless rejoicing is madness. For I at least was rejoicing as I scrambled up in the wake of Dan Rodney, since what I had seen when the bellying sail gave view was a man lying along the crosstrees—and, even at that distance, I had seen that his face was scarred from the right eye down to the chin!

That the man had seen us was evident, for he raised himself from his crouching position and I saw that he held a pistol. Even as I climbed I realized that this was probably a weapon which he had taken from the sentry he had wounded.

“Look out, Dan!” I cried. “He’s armed!”

“Aye, I see that!” came back Dan’s answer; and I saw Rodney pull out his own pistol and cling to the lines, taking shelter behind the mast, while he saw to the priming. At that moment there came a crack from below—and I knew that some one had fired a musket, even before I saw Trenden’s left hand, with which he was retaining his hold, let go, so that he fell forward and was only saved from dropping to the deck by coming up against the sail, where, as a man might in a hammock, he lay, our view of him gone and only the shape of his body visible in the canvas into which he had fallen.

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But, if it meant that we could not see him, it did not mean that he couldn't see us; as you will hear. Dan, by this time, had his pistol ready and was climbing again, I hard after him; but when we were within the space of two men's lengths of the canvas in which Trenden lay a hole appeared in the canvas, slashed by a knife, and next instant the man's pistol spoke. Whether it was the man trembling with fear or the swinging of the sail I know not, but, firing at such close quarters though he did, he missed Rodney and the ball whistled between him and me; and then Dan had fired at the opening in the canvas, stopping only to do that, and then scurrying onward, so that he reached the spot ere Trenden's cry had died away.

I was close up with him, but had to stay behind a little while; Dan threw his legs over the crosstree, and I tell you, my master, it was a strange sight that met my eyes, when, Dan, having left the tree, I got on to it and looked into the bellying sail. For Dan Rodney was in that with his hands gripped around Trenden's throat—as strange a fight in as strange a place as ever man saw.

So strange was it that I wondered it could have been possible, and even in those tense moments I saw the explanation. Some of the ropes of the sail had been severed, either by clumsy shooting of Trenden or by Dan Rodney as he made for his man before he leaped into close quarters. To me, though, it did not matter how it had happened that two men could be, as it were, in a hammock fashioned out of a sail that for all its faults

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was still helping the ship along. What mattered to me most was that one of those men was the only man who, ever since I had been thrown upon an unfeeling world, had befriended me, and I knew that it was my part to do all that I might do to help him.

The which I did.

Dan, having thrust his pistol into his breeches pocket, had jumped into the fray with naught but his own strong hands to help him, whereas I saw that Trenden had a knife in his hand which proved as useless as his unloaded pistol, because not only did Dan Rodney clap tightening fingers around the man's throat, but I, without any qualms on matters of fairness, lay over the beam, half in the sail and half out, and made aim with my pistol stock at Trenden's head—giving it such a clout that the fellow yelped like a kicked dog.

Then, even as I lifted my hand to repeat the blow, there came a sound of tearing, and Trenden and Dan Rodney went dropping through the sail. I knew on the instant what had happened. The hole that the traitor had slashed through the canvas had enlarged itself as the two men fought and struggled. I hung over the beam, stared down through the overhanging ends, my heart in my mouth. To me it mattered little what might happen to Trenden; it was Rodney that I liked not the fate of.

I tell you, my masters, that I could have wept like a big baby when I saw Dan Rodney hanging like a climb-

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ing cat to the ratlines just below while Trenden went to the deck, tumbling over and over.

"Hold on, Dan," I cried, and dropped from the beam back on to the lines, down which I scrambled, reaching Rodney at last and finding that what I had thought had happened by a deliberate effort on his part, had really been the result of an accident—an accident which although it meant pain and a broken arm for Dan Rodney, at least meant the saving of his life. Having fallen out of the broken sail, he had flung out a hand, the hand that had been grasping Trenden's throat, and had been caught up by a ratline, so that he was suspended in mid-air for a moment also, during which he had managed to obtain a foothold as well, which took the burden off the arm which was curiously curled about the line.

"Hold on, Dan," I said again when I reached him, and then wondered what I could do, for my puny strength and my unseamanship were not equal to the task of helping him down. Yet I need not have worried overmuch, because by this time those down on deck who had seen us racing up the mast and had since seen the accident were coming up towards us, so that very presently it was possible to loosen Dan from his danger. It was a terrible journey down to the deck weighted as we were with Dan, who had actually swooned away, but we managed to do it, and at last were on the deck close beside the heap that once had been Trenden.

"Heigho, there!" came a loud voice, and turning

round I saw Francis Drake himself, awaiting an explanation.

"What's to do?" he asked. I told him in a few words and simple, whereat he gave orders that Dan should be taken down to the surgeon, I with him, and there I waited whilst Dan was recovering his senses, and his arm was slung and having all the comfort that was possible for him.

"Lad," said Dan Rodney, when he was able to take an interest in things, "that was a narrow thing! How fares Trenden?"

I told him that the man was dead.

"It is a pity, Dan," I said, "because that means we will never know whether 'twas Trenden who showed the signal and blew up the *Roaming Death*."

"No, Roger."

Dan told me there would be no need to worry on that score. "Why should Trenden try to kill two men? It is as plain as a pikestaff that 'twas he."

"And we were wrong all through about Master Garrish?" I asked wonderingly.

"That's as may be, Roger," Rodney said. "Though I doubt not that these two were somewhat of friends. Natheless, 'tis not altogether a sorry thing since we let Garrish know what was happening, and that the traitor has been found. He will have the opinion that he is safe and not suspected, which, an I know aught about it, is what the Admiral would have happened!"

We were speaking in low voices as we two were in

the cabin together, for we had learned that even the sails of ships have ears. Aye, voices too, because, low as we spoke, we spoke not soft enough. I had not heard the door open and I heard a voice, the voice of Francis Drake, say :

"Yea, Master Rodney, that be the very truth, but 'twere wise that you did not speak these matters above a whisper. How fares the arm? The surgeon says it is, after all, but a simple breakage."

"I hope it is, sir," Dan said, walking across the floor.

He pulled up short before the Admiral and went on speaking softly :

"Sir," he said, "it might serve a good purpose, an it has not already been done, to make a search of Trenden, lest he have aught upon him of value to us."

"It has been done, Master Rodney," said Drake with a wry smile. "And in truth there were found on him papers that told plainly enough that he had been bought of the Dons, to do all that he could to upset us, both by such deeds as those already done, and also by sowing disaffection amongst the men. Ah, well, his chances be gone, and he too! Feel you fit, Master Rodney, to go aboard the *Francis* with the rest o' the men who're even now in th' boat ready?"

"Garrish amongst them?" Dan asked crisply. The Admiral told us that Garrish was there also; aye, and he told us, too, that all the crew had been informed of the treachery of Trenden, which, so it seemed, had been

of mighty relief to Garrish, to judge by the look on his face when the news was given.

"He suspects naught," said Francis Drake. "This much is in our favor for a while until we come into the west: he can do little harm in the way of giving information to the Dons. Natheless, watch him well!"

Somehow, despite the hope in the Admiral's words, there was something in his tones that made me run cold adown the back—missing was that care-free trait that I had grown used to, and besides, there were lines upon his face as though he spent much time in anxious thought. And his eyes were the eyes of a man who was seeing many things other than those that appear close before us, and I told myself that there must be more than a little truth in the tales I had heard of dissension between Drake and Hawkins, and disaffection amongst the crews, bred of the disaster at the Canaries. To tell the truth, I too was feeling not at all joyful over affairs; there seemed to be too many cross-currents for my liking, as I knew there were for Dan's. Such thoughts as these passed through my mind as Dan and I followed the Admiral from the cabin, and so arrived on the deck of the *Defiance*, and entered the boat, rocking idly over-side, waiting to take us across the waters to the *Francis*.

Men of the *Defiance* waved us farewell, and as I looked back and saw Drake standing on the poop, I little imagined that it was to be the last time I should see my Admiral, though I still had that strange feeling of unknown terrors—a feeling which, as you will see,

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my masters, was not a foolish one, though I do admit that I have no explanation of it.

There were more sorrowful hearts than mine in the fleet when we lost sight of the Canary to the east and set full sail for the west, though, as the weeks passed by, and naught further distressful happened, that feeling wore off to a great extent. Especially to me was that voyage of a month across the Atlantic a pleasurable one, for the bite of the winds, the health-giving scent of the seas, the free easiness of life aboard ship, all these things served to fill a young heart with something other than forebodings; and I had forgotten my premonitions by the time that the fleet, without having met any untoward events, fetched the Windward Islands, on the 27th October, when we first sighted Martinique. During all this time, as you may guess, we had kept silent and careful watch on Garrish, but nothing had happened to cause us further anxiety, while the man himself had completely recovered from the effects of the blow from Trenden's chains. Dan Rodney, too, had made good progress, although he still carried his left arm in a sling, and often growled to me that he feared he would be a stayer aboard the ship when others were fighting their way on land to the treasures of the Main.

Never shall I forget that night when we came in sight of the islands; many a storm had I passed through since leaving England, but the gale that raged that night was greater than any of them, and every man was kept hard at work, helping the gallant little *Francis*—

A FIGHT IN THE BELLING SAIL

she was of no more than thirty-five tons, a mere cockle-boat compared with some of the fine ships in the fleet—fight the storm. It was a terrible night, indeed, and often I thought that the end had come as the vessel plowed into the troughs of the water, or mounted the crests of the great waves, heeled as though she would turn turtle, and then, as by a miracle, righted herself, and drove her nose into the teeth of the wind. Yet the tight little ship lived through that night of terror, and we, who had scarce hoped to see daylight again, did at last witness the dawn break in the graying east. But there were some things that we did not see, and they were many of the ships in company with which we had till then been sailing.

Six of them were missing, amongst them the *Defiance*, and not a man of us all did not wonder what fate had overtaken them. Hawkins's ship was with us, and, as we discovered, it had been arranged that in case of a separation of this kind, rendezvous should be kept off the southeast coast of Guadeloupe, whither, with the storm somewhat abated, course was set.

And now I come to what to me, at least, was the greatest tragedy of all. Some things of it you will find in the accounts written by the scribes who set down history for posterity: but there be others which you may search for in such records and find no mention other than this from an imperfect pen. Yet I, who was there and witnessed them, aye, took part in them,

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and whose life thereafter was thrown in strange places because of them, do tell that which I know.

Now I would have you know that the *Francis* was a fast sailer, and, so I had been told, had often enough shown clean heels to chasing Dons; but, as with men, so with ships, there comes a time when fate decrees the end.

It was on the 30th of October, an I remember correctly, and the *Francis* was a long distance behind the rearmost ship of Hawkins's squadron. Like sails of fishing boats we had seen the sails of our companions dip over the horizon and were plowing our way through fairly calm seas when there came to our sight again tops of ships.

"We be catching up wi' them, lad," Dan Rodney said to me.

We lay on the deck armed like all the rest, for I'll have you understand that since we entered these seas we had been all ready for fighting, knowing not when we might fall in with Spanish vessels.

"Aye, we be so," said a man near us. "And it be a good thing, too, for I like not the thought o' being on one ship that might fall amongst Spanish thieves! I ha' been in like corner afore!"

I turned and looked at him, and recognized him for a man we called One-Arm Barton, as merry a rover of the seas as you could hope to meet, whose tales of the Main had often kept me awake well into the night, since I had been aboard the *Francis*. And I knew it

was not cowardice, but knowledge, that made him speak so.

"Well, there be no fear o' that, now," I told him laughingly.

Looking up I saw the sailormen busy with the sails, clapping on more canvas, so that the ship should take advantage of every puff of wind to enable her to close up with our consorts.

So while we were racing onward the men fell, as was their wont, to telling stories of other days and other ventures, and I listened with ears agog, forgetting all of the present in gloating over the past. Until there came a shout from the lookout man that sent us every one scrambling to foot, and whipping out weapons, while the gunners padded to their guns, and the ship became a buzzing hive.

"Spaniards ahead!"

That was the cry of the watch, and when the captain came racing up on the deck to see what all the commotion was about he verified the news.

We had been gayly romping toward ships that we thought were our consorts and, coming within gunshot distance, had discovered that we had run our necks into as great a danger as any ever could. For there were five Spanish frigates, great fighting ships, bearing down upon us; and, even as we turned to flee, we saw puffs of smoke break from their sides, and soon balls were throwing up spouting water all about us.

“Men!” roared our captain, as brave a man as ever trod oak, “’tis a matter for fighting, since we’ll never give these Dons the slip. You’ll fight like good men and true!”

“Aye, aye!” they roared back in reply; and our guns answered those of the Spaniards, who made a circle about us, and smothered us with metal that bored holes in our sides and brought down our mast about our ears. Yet, still did we fight on and on, with decks gory. Those of us who were not working the guns were made to stay below, I amongst them, though I had rather been above.

As if my wish had been heard, there came the moment when shouting voices called down for gunners, and Dan Rodney and I, since that was our duty, went speeding up on to deck in answer to the call, to find that one of the guns had had its crew killed. Whereupon Dan fell to work with a will, and I no less behind him. Stripped we were to the waist, and I wondered greatly, even in those tense moments, that Dan should have discarded his shirt and left his chest exposed with the chart plain to be seen by all who would look at him.

“Dan,” I panted, as we reloaded after a shot that had knocked the foretop off one of the Dons, “’tis the end o’ the quest!”

“Aye, Roger, the end,” he replied, looking down at his hairy chest. “And there be not time now, lad, but if aught happens to me I pray you draw a sharp knife

across this chart so that none may read it. Hast seen aught of Garrish of late?"

"Not since the fight began," I told him, firing off the gun that he had laid again. "'Twas well laid, Dan!" I cried, as I saw another sail go by the board.

How Dan Rodney had worked the gun I know not, with one arm in the sling, but he had done it, I helping him. But the time came when he could do no more, for a close-ranged shot of case scattering about the deck cut Rodney down and left him at my feet, bleeding from a wound in his side.

"Fight the gun, Roger, fight the gun!" he called out, and, impressing a man near at hand, I put myself to the task, not a little pleased when I saw that one of my shots had cut right through a Spanish mast, sending it toppling.

But that was my last shot, for something that seemed like a hot brand sped across my forehead, and I went tumbling over Rodney who lay still where he had fallen.

What happened thereafter I cannot tell from having seen, but from what was told me later when I opened mine eyes and started up, only to tumble back because my head seemed too heavy for my body.

I lay for a while, gathering wits amazed at the silence of everything, compared with the din of battle that had been in my ears as I dropped off into unconsciousness. Then the moan of a dog in pain came to me, I raised myself more carefully, coming to rest on my elbow, and, as my vision cleared, I saw Dan Rodney lying not

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far from me. A moan came from him. I got me to my feet and staggered across to where he lay, bent down beside him and drew away again, a great cry coming to my lips as I did so.

And, heaven forgive me, I cursed the Dons and Jack Garrish with them. As well I might, for where once there had been a chart on the chest of Dan Rodney, there was now but a criss-cross patch of blood-red marks, which blotted out the image. I think I must have been mad in those moments, for I raved and cursed again, forgetting that my work was to see what I could do for Dan Rodney. I gazed about the shambles, questing for a sight of Jack Garrish, yet knowing in my heart that he would not be there. How came it that the chart had been spoiled forever in such a callous manner?

For I knew that the secret for which the Dons had been questing so long must have been wrested from Rodney, and we who had come to use the secret lay hopeless on a wide and empty sea as but one look around told me, there being no sign of a sail distant or near.

And, moreover, the *Francis* lay like a helpless derelict with sails down and a great list to starboard so that it seemed she must soon go diving to her grave, and I and Dan, and who else there might be alive, with her.

CHAPTER X

"DEAD MEN EVERYWHERE"

I HAVE told you, my masters, of the madness that seized me when I gazed down upon the mutilated chest of Dan Rodney; but it was a madness that soon left me—left me strangely calm and able to think clearly.

"Poor wretch!" I muttered, as I stooped once more and listened to his heart, my own leaping within me when I found that he still breathed. Whereupon I went below deck, never stopping to look at those other huddled and stark figures up there, none of them moving. I had a plan in my head which was to find something to try to revive Dan with, and I went to the surgeon's cabin, wondering what I should find there. I found him dead across the body of some poor wretch whom, I doubted not, he had been tending when a shot killed him.

Phials there were of many a kind, and I stood and looked at them wondering what it was that I could do that I might give Dan something that, instead of reviving him, might complete the work the Dons had begun. Then I saw written something that I remembered having seen on a flask when, back in Bristol, the

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surgeon had ministered to me. It was with a shout of joy that I took it from the case and carried it, like a precious treasure, up on to the deck, pausing only to get me a flagon from the captain's cabin, a flagon of spirit.

Stooping beside Dan, I moistened his parched and swollen lips with the burning stuff, and then, weakening it with water, poured some down his throat, so that presently he heaved a sigh and I felt the blood running more quickly through his body and his heart beating faster. Then I applied the liquid from the phial on to the vivid flesh, and remembering how cool it had been to me in those far-off days, felt no little relief now as I told myself that it was soothing, no doubt, to my comrade.

I washed the wounds thoroughly, pausing every now and then to give more of the reviving liquor from the flagon, and then a new thought came to me. I remembered how Dan had been shot down, and I quested for the wound. I found it, a hole in his side, but I breathed with relief when, even with my little knowledge of such things, I saw that the ball had missed the bone and plowed through the hip.

That wound also I doctored as best I could, and lost all count of time, though it seemed an age to me ere my eyes joyed to see those of Dan Rodney open a little, and then close again as though the light of the sun were too much for them.

"Dan!" I whispered, and the eyes opened again.

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“Roger!” came the feeble word in reply, and I do admit that I wept at the hearing of it.

Nevertheless, I ceased not my efforts, and knowing that it would not do for Dan to speak, stopped him when he essayed to do so; whereupon he lay quiet, never wincing at my clumsy doctoring as I toiled over him for yet a while longer, finally binding up the chest as best I knew how, with much of the healing liquid on the rough pad I placed there.

“Roger—your own wound!” came the words from Dan then, as his gathering senses and his clearing eyes enabled him to take somewhat of interest in things.

I do confess that till then I had forgotten my own wound, though there was enough of pain to at other times have set me no doubt to groaning with it! Now, I felt my head, and found that a deep groove was there from front to back along one side.

“I’ll doctor it, Dan!” I said, with a laugh that was the very mockery of mirth. And did so, the while I gazed about the deck. . . . A very shambles and a wreck indeed.

I finished my surgery, and then, seeing that Dan was as comfortable as I could hope him to be, moved amongst the dead men, hoping to find some that lived.

And out of them all I found but two, and they not wounded but sick men below deck.

Believe me, my masters, I became a grown man in that time; somehow, too, I forgot my own weakness. It was as if the knowledge that, of the four left alive

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on that doomed ship, I alone was able to move about freely had given me added strength. My head became clearer, and having soon done what I could for the fevered men, I went me back on deck and sat beside Dan Rodney, trying to make a plan for doing something.

Dan was asleep, and when I bent over him I was glad to find that it was more easy sleep than before, so that I left him untouched, preferring to let what I had already done take its full effects on him. I bethought me of food and drink—and going below found some stores; as I looked at them the thought came to me that it was idle to remain on a listing ship which might go to the bottom at any moment, and certainly could not withstand anything of a rough sea. I went on deck again and round the ship, finding, to my great relief, one boat that had escaped the devastating fire of the Dons.

“ ’Twill do!” I muttered. “ ’Tis, at any rate, better than staying here!”

Then I began to carry out my plan. I took a length of wood wherewith, in due time, to fashion a mast, and cut off lengths of canvas from the ruined sails. These I put into the boat with as many stores and as much water as I could manage to find room for, after allowing for the four of us who lived. I searched for arms, and found them, and some powder and shot, which I wrapped in sheltering covers and placed in the boat. Then I went below to the sick men, and made

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them understand what I wanted to do. Sick though they were they roused themselves, and I helped to wrap them up in warm clothes, for I knew the danger that lay before them of being in an open boat. Weak they were and tottering, but they got them on to the deck, where I roused Dan Rodney and told him my plan.

How much of it all he understood I know not.

“Do what you will, Roger!” was all that he said, and never a word of pain did he utter as we three, sick men all of us, lifted him and carried him to the boat, placing him in as gently as we could. Then I chose a man who seemed fitter of the two to help me lower away the craft, making the other get in the boat with Dan.

I tell you 'twas with relief that I saw the boat touch the water and knew that, at least, that difficult task was done. Whereupon we two others did clamber down the holed side of the poor *Francis* and take our places in the boat, I at once taking the oars and rowing away from the doomed vessel.

“An you know how,” I said to the man who had helped me lower the boat, “rig you up a sail!” And I pointed to the wood and the canvas.

It must be that danger acts like a tonic to a sick man, for that fellow, by name of Abel Cooke he was, set to work, trembling though he was with the fever, and toiled at doing what I could not do from inexperience, so that after many hours, during which some-

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times I rowed and sometimes gave him a hand, we made some progress toward the west—as I knew by the position of the sun. Long ere the task was over, however, we had seen how well advised had been my plan of leaving the *Francis*, for, within half an hour of taking to the boat, we saw the ship we had just left go down beneath the surface. And I thanked heaven that had helped us to get away, for at least we stood a chance of living yet awhile longer and, haply, of being picked up by some passing vessel—though I do confess that I had little hope that it would be other than a Don.

For three days we roamed that unknown sea—three days during which I tended my companions with what skill I possessed, though I do know now that it was providence and the virile strength of those men that kept them alive, rather than my ignorant efforts. Three days, too, during which we saw neither ship nor land, but always were going westward, setting course by the sun by day and the stars by night, and thankful for our imperfect sail since we had not to labor at the oars.

And during that time I did learn from Dan, in fitful spurts when he could talk, or I would allow him to, the story of what had happened on the *Francis* after I had gone down to deck.

Dan had been conscious, though weak from loss of blood, and he had seen all that took place. The frigates had gathered round like vultures about their prey, and the *Francis* had been silenced, boarded and captured. The living men of her crew had been taken

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aboard the Spanish ships, Jack Garrish amongst them; but ere Garrish went Dan, who had been deprived of what weapons he had on him, had been dragged before an officer.

“And Roger,” Dan said softly, “an you dream a thousand dreams you’ll never dream what ’twas that rogue did say to the officer!”

“Nay, I am past dreaming, I think,” I told him. “What was it?”

“This!” said Dan, and you will understand with what amazement I listened to the words that followed. “Jack Garrish—bah—” Dan laughed feebly as he spoke the word. “Garrish took from his eye the shade patch that covered it during the months we had known him, and peered down into my face, mockingly laughing at me.

“‘Know you who I am, Master Rodney?’ he asked me, and I cursed him for a villainous traitor.

“‘Nay, not a traitor to England, but a loyal man to Spain!’ he said, laughing still. ‘An I could crop this ragged beard of mine, mayhap you would recognize one called Enriquez!’

“I tell you, Roger,” Dan went on, as I stared at him with wondering eyes, “’twas a shock that left me speechless, though Enriquez and the other Don, to whom he showed some paper that he pulled from his jacket, were wordy enow, and laughing all the time. Then, before I could recover myself to speak, Enriquez, for that it was he I doubt not, had spoken again to me.

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“ ‘Master Rodney,’ he said, ‘an you will tell the meaning o’ the chart you, aye, and that cub with you, shall be taken off this ship with the rest of the crew. Is that not so?’ he turned and asked the officer, who nodded agreement.”

At this point, eager though I was to know more of the amazing matter, I refused to listen further, because it was plain to me that Dan had spoken long enough for the time being, and so I had to wait, and turn over in my mind what he had already told me, as surely as strange a story as ever man heard. To think that we had lived with Enriquez for all those months and known it not! Yet, ’twas not so passing strange, because after all we had seen but little of him before, but fleeting glimpses in moments of fierce action against him, except that time when he had stood in the dim light in Drake’s cabin. The memory of that time made me wonder what Drake would have said had he been with us to hear Rodney’s story, and the thought of Drake set me to thinking again, as I had thought often during those last three days, how fared the fleet. Truly, matters had moved with swift passage!

I was all anxious to hear the rest of Dan’s story, but it was fated to bide awhile longer, for heaven again proved kind to us that afternoon, and in the excitement of things I almost forget everything else but the fact that succor, for which we had longed and prayed and looked, had come to us.

For afar off on the horizon, and, so it seemed to us,

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setting a course in our direction, there appeared a sail, so that I stood me up in the boat and shouted myself hoarse. A foolish thing to do, since the ship was too far off even for a gun's fire to have been heard! Yet, such foolish things will men do at such times. We set our own course so that we should cut closely across that of the coming vessel, caring little, I fear me, whether she should prove to be English or Spanish, or what not; all that mattered was that she was a ship and would take us aboard—for even if she were Spanish we doubted not that we should be taken, although that would mean being thrown into prison on shore in due course.

Slowly we drew nearer and nearer together, and with every yard our excitement ran higher. We thanked heaven again and again for our sail, which must prove a signal, since 'twas passing strange indeed that so small a craft should be a-sailing on the wide seas. That strange vessel was like a sign from heaven to us. We feasted our eyes upon her and shouted—aye, even the fevered men shouted as we came closer to her, and the three of us waved jackets in the air to attract attention.

And presently we knew that we had been seen; we dropped, exhausted men, into our boat and waited for the ship to come up with us, which she did after a while, a boat being cast off to make an examination of us.

My masters, imagine our feelings as we saw that boat

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coming toward us. Did it mean salvation and freedom—or did it mean a mere saving from the seas in exchange for a Spanish prison? We stared like wild men trying to pick out the features of the men in the boat, and at last I gave a great shout:

“ ’Tis an English ship, masters!” I cried.

“St. George and Merry England!” we all raised our voices in the great battle cry of Francis Drake, and then wept tears of joy, which were streaming down our cheeks when the new-coming boat reached us. The sight of English faces, when we had expected Spanish, was almost too much for us, and this, added to the exposure of three days in an open boat, caused us to break down utterly.

“Ahoy, there!” came the good old rousing cry. “Who are you?”

“Men of the *Francis*,” I shouted back. “Sunk by Spanishers!”

“The *Francis*,” cried the man who had first spoken. “What ship is that?”

“An you will get us aboard, sir, we will tell you. Suffice for the present, though, a ship of Admiral Drake’s!”

At the mention of Drake’s name, the newcomers peered over at us, and without another word threw us a line which I, without loss of time, lashed to our boat: and so with our own sail helping us, and the other boat lending a brave hand, we at last reached the ship which we had been watching for so long hopefully.

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Never were men more pleased than we, when Dan Rodney, having been assisted by many willing hands, stood upon the deck of the ship. I had seen to it long ere this that Dan's scarred chest was well covered up, but it needed no words of mine to tell our saviors that the man was ill. And even as I opened my mouth to ask that he should be taken to the hospital quarters, a man stepped from the crowd that had thronged the side and issued orders that Dan should be taken below.

“Sir,” I said, striding toward him. “These two other men have need of care since they have the ship fever.” Whereupon both the sick men were escorted below.

“Young sir,” said the stranger when this was done, “you, too, look as though you have need of care, and I do perceive that there be no small story behind all this.”

“Sir,” I told him, “’tis no small story indeed, but a story that would make strong men weep, methinks.” And without more ado I plunged me into the telling of it, but ere I had gone far, a man pulled me up short.

“Hold!” he exclaimed. “We will wait until we be down in my cabin and you have tasted something that will warm chilled blood.”

So, with many wondering eyes gazing after me, I followed down the companionway and so into his well-appointed cabin. My first glimpse of it told me that this was no ship of poverty, while here and there were things which reminded me somewhat of other things which I had seen in Francis Drake's own state cabin—

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things that had, I doubted me not, been wrested from the houses of Dons on the Main.

"Sit you down, young master," the man said, "mayhap you have a name?"

"Aye, sir," I told him with a smile, as I sat in a well-carved chair. "That is Roger Hampsley of Bristol."

"Gadzooks!" he exclaimed, leaping to his feet. "There be but one Roger Hampsley that I know, and him I met in these same seas many years ago."

"Mayhap, sir," I told him, "'twas my father!"

Whereupon he asked me many a question which answering proved that this man, who gave his name as Captain Richford of the good ship *Seeker of Pleasure*, out of Plymouth, had indeed known my father in the years when he, too, roamed the Spanish Main.

I tell you, my masters, that I was pleased to learn this, and if I be any judge of a man, and can read a man's eyes, 'twas pleasure also to Captain Richford, who took my hand and used it as a man might use a handle of a pump, till I thought me it would loose its very socket.

"Roger Hampsley," he said at last, "I am pleased to meet you. I thank heaven that I have been able to do somewhat of a service to the son of an old friend. Drink that!" and he pushed a bowl toward me. "Then tell me the story!"

"You say that Francis Drake's in these seas?"

"Aye, sir," I told him. "That is indeed the truth." And began me to recite the tale of the expedition out of

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Plymouth, right up to the time when we had seen his ship on the skyline. Though there was one thing that I did keep to mine own counsel, and that was the story of the Flaming Cross and the chart that had been blotted off the chest of Dan Rodney.

CHAPTER XI

WESTWARD BOUND ONCE MORE

I DOUBTED not that it would be easy to explain Rodney's chest, and there should be necessity, as the result of a wound in the fight with the Spaniards.

"It is the kind of thing, Master Roger," said Captain Richford when I had ended my tale, "that the Dons do. They leave sick men and wounded with as much heed as a man leaves a mad dog bleeding on the roadside!"

"Aye, sir, aye, sir," I said in reply. "Tales I have heard many a time of the ruthless cruelty of these same Dons, and I do confess that at times I have thought that there were not all too much truth in them, but now I know, and henceforth no Don shall find mercy at my hands."

"Well spoken, Roger," he told me, "well spoken!"

"And now I do perceive that you do nod over your bowl and would sleep, which you may do here."

"I thank you, sir," I answered, "but one thing I would crave is that those three companions of mine may be tended; and another, that you might tell me whither the *Seeker of Pleasure* is bound?"

"Homeward to Plymouth are we bound," the cap-

tain told him. "And as for that other request of yours, it will already have been seen to. And it may please you to know that Surgeon Powe is no mean sawbones. Rest your mind over your friends!"

At these words he went out of the cabin and left me to myself, and I was not alone many moments before I was fast asleep, for during all the days and nights that we had been in the open boat since leaving the *Francis*, I had slept scarcely more than a cat's sleep here and there. . . .

I awoke refreshed and found Captain Richford sitting in his cabin, as if waiting for me to rouse myself.

"Ah," he said, when he saw me stretch myself. "Feel you any better?"

"Aye, as fresh as a new-blown flower!" I told him with a laugh. "How fares Dan Rodney?"

"The surgeon has taken him in hand, Master Roger," was the reply, "and he tells me that he doubts not that Master Rodney will make recovery, though it will be many a day 'fore he can hope to take part in man's work again."

"I'd like to see him, sir," I said, and he nodded, as if he understood my feelings.

"Wilt not eat first?" he asked.

I told him I would rather wait until I had seen Rodney. Whereupon, he called for a servant and had me guided to the quarters where I found Dan Rodney, looking comfortable enough, but having withal the face of a man who had suffered much agony.

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“Roger!” he said, when he saw me, and his face lighted up with a smile. “Heaven has been kind to us.”

“Aye, heaven has!” I replied. “How feel you now?”

“Much as a pig would feel an the skin of him had been scarred for roasting while he was yet alive!” he said, and I knew, for all his attempted cheerfulness, he was still suffering great pain. “That chirurgion may be a better man at his work than you, Roger, but he hurts more, too! What have you told them aboard this ship?” he demanded suddenly. “Aught of the Cross?”

“Never a word,” I said. “It is a promise among us that we speak not to strangers of that, eh? Though, i’faith, the captain of this ship be not altogether a stranger, in a manner of speaking.”

And I told him of how Captain Richford was a friend of my father’s, long ago.

“Much of a friend, did he say, Roger?”

Dan asked me at that, and I told him I had gathered that they had been well friendly in those days.

“But why?” I questioned him.

“I’ll tell ye another time, lad. I must think a little. Meantime, Roger, there’ll be more things you’ll be wanting to know, eh?”

And, as you will understand, I was not slow in telling him he spoke truly, whereupon, he continued the tale that had been interrupted by the first sight of the *Seeker of Pleasure*.

“Let me see,” he puckered his brow. “I had told

you already that that devil Enriquez offered me life, and your life too, if I would explain to him the meaning of the chart. Well, lad, I looked at you as you lay on the deck, senseless, and I was sore tempted to tell. For myself, I cared little: but I felt that you had been lured away by me, and that I owed you something. Then I steeled my heart, believing that you would have me do so and——”

“You did well, indeed, Dan!” I said softly, and his eyes smiled at me for my words, as he went on:

“I steeled my heart, lad, for that reason, and because I knew enough of the Dons to know that their words are as strong as a piece of string that a man can break with his fingers! So I told Enriquez that he could go to his master the devil, whereat he grew angry and slashed me across the face. I would have strangled him then and there, Roger, an I had had the strength. But I was too weak, and could but glare at him.

“ ’Tis the last chance that I give you!” he roared at me: and still I kept silence. Then he turned to the officer and they spoke awhile together. A little later I was seized and stretched on the deck, and held down by my legs and arms—they cared not that I had still a wounded arm, Roger. Enriquez pulled out a knife.

“ ‘An you do not speak,’ he told me, ‘this knife will take the chart from your chest.’

“I did not answer, lad, but I do admit that I almost gave in at the threat. Weak indeed I must have been,

for just then I did swoon away like any woman with fright: and when I came to, it was with the feeling of burning pain in my chest, and, looking down, I saw the red lines there: and Enriquez standing before me, holding a traced copy of the chart. He had taken it while I slept, and then had drawn his knife to and fro across my chest.

"I cursed Enriquez till my throat was hoarse—cursed, too, my own helplessness. Then with a mocking laugh Enriquez went over the side—and raising myself on my elbow I saw a boat reach one of the frigates. Presently the frigate made sail, and I gazed about the deck of the *Francis*. Not a man of all those lying there moved—not even you, and I could not drag myself over to where you lay, so that I knew not whether you were dead or alive. Roger, I think I must have gone mad then. I do not know. All I know is that I did call down the vengeance of heaven on those fiends: dropped again into a merciful unconsciousness, and knew nothing more until I found you bending over me."

He stopped speaking at that, and looked at me as I sat beside him. There, with my head buried in my hands, I was weeping like a schoolboy just whipped. He reached out a hand and stroked my hair.

"Nay, Roger," he said, gently. "Take not on so, lad. We live—and some day, maybe—we shall find our revenge!"

"Aye, Dan," I said, straightening myself and dash-

ing the tears away. "I would give the treasure of the Main, an I had it, to take vengeance on Enriquez for what he has done to you. But there be little hope of that. He has gone, and we'll never see him again. For we are bound for Plymouth!"

"Tell me, Roger," Dan asked then. "Hast heard whereabout this vessel is?"

"Nay," I told him, greatly wondering what was behind the question.

"Then go you to this Captain Richford, who was a friend of your father, and ask him. More, Roger, beseech him that he come to speak with me. While I have been speaking I have thought and maybe—— But, Roger, go do my bidding!"

Now, I had come to the point where I would have gone into the hottest fire an Dan Rodney told me to, and so, without staying to seek the meaning of his request, I left the cabin and went me to that of Captain Richford.

"How fares your friend?" he asked kindly, when I entered.

"As well as a man can under such trouble," I told him. "Sir," I went on, "he bids me ask of you two questions."

"Ask them, lad!" the captain told me, and I forthwith spoke the things that Dan had said.

"We be a matter of a week or more's sail from the mainland," he told me. "But what is that to your friend?"

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"That I know not, sir," I told him. "Methinks 'tis for that he would have speech with you, an you be pleased to see him."

"Come with me," he said on the instant, and I followed back into the cabin where Dan lay.

When we entered his eyes lit up with pleasure, and he spoke words of thanks to Captain Richford for what had been done for him.

"Sailormen all we be, Master Rodney, and Englishmen at that!" the captain said with a smile as though that were enough reason for what had been done. "But what is't you would say to me?"

"Sir," said Dan, "I do understand that you did know this boy's father?"

"Aye, right well I did, and glad of it!" was the reply. "Old Roger Hampsley was as good a man as ever trod deck, and as brave a fighter as ever handled musket."

"Sir, I have a tale that I would tell you, an you be pleased to listen," said Dan Rodney, quietly, but with confidence.

Forthwith Rodney launched him out into the tale of the Flaming Cross of Santa Marta, together with the things that had happened to him as the result of the Spaniards' search for the secret chart, omitting no detail, nor sparing himself the horror of the recital again of the way in which Enriquez had secured it. And as he spoke I glanced from him to the captain time and again, and saw the knuckles of Richford

showing white as he clenched his fists, and noticed the straightness of his lips, and the gleam in his eyes. Yet, he spoke not a word to interrupt Dan, but listened quietly.

“Captain Richford, that is the story,” Dan finished up, “and yonder, on the Main, lies a rich treasure for the taking by brave men. Francis Drake has the secret of the hiding place, but I doubt me whether he can reach Santa Marta before Enriquez, who will lose no time in getting there. An you be not wedded to the plan of reaching Plymouth yet awhile——”

It was only then that Captain Richford spoke, and his words made my heart leap in my breast.

“Master Rodney,” he said, and although he spoke quietly there was a ring in his voice that thrilled me, “Master Rodney, I understand what it is you would have done. The *Seeker of Pleasure* is laden till she rides low in the water with treasure that has been taken from many a Spanish hold, but an I know my men there be not one among them but will jump to the chance of yet another haul, though I do swear that not one of them shall touch aught of that hoard, an we find it!”

“How so, sir?” Dan demanded eagerly.

“Because an they do this thing that you wish, I’ll see to it that you keep pact with Francis Drake, for I myself will give them shares of my share of the plunder already taken by us. Come, Master Hampsley, we’ll go on deck and put the matter afore them!”

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I tell you that I swung on my heels smartly at that, only pausing to throw a glance of exultation at Dan Rodney whose face was a picture indeed: and then followed Captain Richford to the deck, where he had all hands piped, and told them that he had a story for their ears.

Whereupon, to my astonishment, and not a little consternation, he commanded that I tell the tale to them.

I fear me that I made but a sorry story-teller, and could have wished that it was Dan himself standing in my place; but, as I went on, I gathered confidence, especially as the men seemed to hang upon my words, and many were the shouts of anger that went up when I came to that part of the taking of the chart from the chest of a living man.

“A tale, my masters, that is like too many another!” cried Captain Richford when I had finished. “A tale that calls on us for vengeance. Down below lies the man, and he would have us go questing for the treasure whose hiding place he has carried the secret of for many a year. Wilt go? That treasure belongs to Dan Rodney and this youth, and to another greater than they—to Francis Drake himself. Wilt go questing for it?”

The shout that went up at those words was dinful to the ears, but it was also joyful to me, and I shook with the emotion of it all as I realized that these men who had been bound for home after months of danger and hard work, were prepared to turn about and help us in a private quest.

WESTWARD BOUND ONCE MORE

“You hear?” Richford turned to me. “You hear—they are willing, and the *Seeker of Pleasure* shall turn back this instant. Bide awhile men, and listen. No man shall be the loser through this, for while we will see that the treasure goes to those to whom it belongs, there shall be shares for every man out of my portion of the treasures we have already taken!”

Once more the air was rent with cheering sounds, and then, at a word from Captain Richford, the men dispersed and I stood by his side watching the sails being trimmed so that the *Seeker of Pleasure* tacked about and went romping toward the west and left me for a while speechless with the wonder of it all, and the hope that we might forestall Enriquez in the race for the Flaming Cross of Santa Marta. . . .

As in a dream I followed Captain Richford down to the cabin, where Dan lay waiting to learn the news of our success or otherwise. But I knew, the moment I saw his face, that he had heard the uproar on deck, and had little doubt of what the answer was.

“We are going, Dan,” I cried. “We are bound for Santa Marta.”

“Captain Richford,” said Dan, looking up at him—and I’ll swear that there were tears in his eyes—“I thank you! One thing only do I regret, and that is that I shall be a-staying on board while you do go questing for the Flaming Cross.”

“But we will have Master Roger with us,” Captain Richford said cheerily. “There is one important thing,

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Rodney, that I should know, and that is how to find where lies hidden the Flaming Cross. I doubt me not that you can remember all of that chart which you have carried with you for these many years."

"An he does not, sir," I said, "I have it graven in my mind," at which Dan Rodney laughed as heartily as a man may laugh in such a parlous state as he was.

"Good lad for ye, Roger," he said. "Scrawl you on parchment what you think you have in your mind. 'Twill be a test, and if you be right the finest ruby that the treasure holds shall be yours above your share!"

So I sat me down, and on parchment and with ink which Captain Richford sent for, I scrawled, not quickly, but slowly, as a man must do who gropes into his memory, what I told myself was a near copy of the chart that once had been plain upon the chest of Dan Rodney. Aye, even to that cross set among what Dan Rodney had said were marks of the hills. That, too, I placed, and I would have wagered that 'twas not far wrong.

"Look you!" I exclaimed when the task was done.

Thrusting the parchment into Dan's hands, I watched him anxiously, wondering whether I had done well or ill. For a few moments Dan's eyes stared at the lines and the marks, and I saw a smile curl about his lips. Then he looked up at me and said:

"Roger, there be no need to keep a chart while you have this burned into your mind. First let me show it to Captain Richford, then we will destroy it lest—

who knows?—some Don sometime may find it! Read you the chart, captain,” and he handed the parchment to Richford, who examined it with care and then passed it back.

“I think you are wise to say that this should not exist,” he told Dan. “Remember that I am in your hands and want to know naught that you would not have me know.”

“We have told you all, sir,” was Dan’s reply, “and we do trust you even as you do trust us. And now methinks I would sleep again, which I can do in peace.”

So Dan turned himself away and we left the cabin, I to wander about the ship, making new friends and going down to see the other two men to find out how they fared. Under the skilled handling of Surgeon Powe they had made better recovery in that short time than they had done under my prentice hand, and their fever was fast leaving them, so that within a week of their getting aboard the *Seeker of Pleasure* they were fit men and well, while Dan also showed improvement. His broken arm was now made whole again, and the flesh wound in the hip healed, so that he was able to move about deck at the end of a week, during which, although we had passed within easy distance of Spanish isles, we had not crossed the course of any ships, either Spanish or English.

That we had not met with any of Drake’s or Hawkins’s ships set me wondering often as to what had happened to them: and it was only when having to put

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in for water at a small bay—and we found there a number of Spanishers and took them prisoners and carried them aboard—that we had learned something of what had happened. It did seem that, after sailing for some days, Hawkins had made rendezvous with Drake at the appointed place, and then, reuniting squadrons, had sailed still farther toward the west, and been sorely disappointed because the Dons had gathered news of their intent to attack Puerto Rico.

Despite the good fortune that had befallen us when we had seen that everything was lost, on hearing this news I felt again, as we plowed toward the west, that foreboding which had overtaken me before the great catastrophe had fallen upon us, and I wondered whether it was to prove as true this time as it had done before. It was Dan's cheerful way which drove such thoughts from my mind.

“Roger,” he said on the day when we sailed nigh to the coast of the Main, “the fate that has brought us so far out of so much danger and difficulty has not done so to bring us disaster now, when we be but a day's sailing off the mainland.”

And, forgetful of his injury, he slapped me upon the back and bade me cheer up, and then winced—the which I knew the reason for.

True, that day I lived upon the deck with Dan, staring across the empty sea, waiting for the first vision of the land; and you will understand that, with the memory in my heart of all the news that I had heard

WESTWARD BOUND ONCE MORE

both from my father and Dan, as well as from scores of rough sea-worn rovers, of the ways and riches of the Main, I was filled with eagerness and expectation. I must have shown this upon my face or in my bearing, for as I stood gripping the rail with my knuckles showing white, a voice spoke quietly, and turning I saw Captain Richford standing beside me.

“Aye, ’tis a great country, is the New World, Roger,” he said, “but it has been spoiled by men, or dogs who call themselves men. Within an hour or so we shall see the shore we have set course for, so that we cast anchor between Santa Marta and La Hacha, whence we shall march inland, and so into the mountains, where—if Enriquez has not already found it—lies the Flaming Cross. We shall land with the moon at its height, and a few hours’ journey should bring us into the hills. An you be wise, you will do as other men are doing who will be of the landing-party—you will sleep.”

I thanked him for his good advice which I knew was good, and got me down to the cabin which I shared with Dan and went to sleep, to awaken when a man’s voice bawled in and bade me rise, for we were at anchor.

Dan Rodney awoke also, and as I saw to it that my weapons were all ready, and that the provisions we had each had doled out to us were safely packed, I saw him get up.

“Roger,” he said, “I’m coming too!”

CHAPTER XII

THE LION'S HEAD

“**B**UT the journey, Dan!” I exclaimed, then found not tongue to say more, because I could tell by the look on his face that he had made up his mind and nothing would change it.

So, together, we went up on deck and found that already a number of boats had left the ship. Captain Richford I saw, and went up to him, Dan beside me.

“Heigho! come to see us away, Rodney?” the captain asked, but Dan laughed.

“Nay; come to go with you!” he said.

“But—” Richford began, and stopped as Dan Rodney put in quietly and firmly:

“I’m going—if it kills me!”

What would you do with a man like that? What Richford did, I doubt not: shake hands with him and say:

“Well, you come in my boat and walk beside me while you can, and be carried an the journey prove too much for you.”

Whereat I saw by the light of the moon that Dan’s face was beaming with smiles; and soon we were in the last boat making for the shore—I pent with excitement.

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I would have you know that, acting upon the information given him by Dan Rodney, Captain Richford had cast anchor in a well-sheltered bay, which had been the spot at which Rodney had aimed to reach during all the years since he had helped conceal the Spanish treasure, since he knew that it provided a rare good starting point for the hills. To the right of us lay Santa Marta, several miles away; to the left, many miles farther, La Hacha, and between these two points lay land unoccupied, unless it be with roving Indians, who might be friendly or hostile, and against whom we should have to keep a sharp lookout, and, in the event of hostility, endeavor to placate lest they go and warn the Dons of our presence.

For this reason, Richford sent out scouts in advance when we started on our journey, while the rest of us, with Richford and Rodney at our head and Prior and I close behind them, went onward two abreast.

It was a toilsome journey, through scrub and over rough ground with no paths, and, now and again, stretches of forest through which we had to force our way; and I do marvel even to this day how Dan Rodney managed to keep on the move for so long ere he at last, faltering of step, sagged behind, so that the captain called out for bearers.

"Make you a litter," he told them, "and see, then, that our comrade has an easy voyage!"

Very hastily was the litter made, and presently four men were marching with us, carrying Rodney.

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For hours we marched thus, staying now and awhile to take somewhat of rest and for the course to be confirmed, and finally coming to halt in a forest, where it was decided to remain during the day, which was now on the break. This course was a wise one, lest we be seen either by Indians or by Spaniards; and I noticed that Richford had a watch set, these men climbing into the tall trees, whence they could view the land for a long distance.

Nevertheless the day passed uneventfully, and, with the coming of night, we were ready once more for the march over the last stage of our journey, which was carried out in like manner as before. Within five hours of our setting forth, Richford, at Rodney's desire, called a halt.

"Captain," he said, "yonder are the hills"; and he pointed to a dark ridge that loomed up beneath the star-filled sky; and I felt my heart leap with the joy of the knowledge that we were at last within easy distance of our objective. "I do think it wise," Dan went on, "that we stay here and send scouts out to view the hills, for I have it in my mind that Master Enriquez will have lost no time, and he has been able to read the chart after any fashion, in getting here; for you must know that the Dons who attacked us those many years ago, knew that it must be somewhere among those hills that we had hidden their treasure."

"And I doubt not that they have searched many a time since then!" Richford said with a chuckle. "I'll

send the scouts, aye, I'll go myself, and Master Roger shall come with me, bringing the chart that he has in his mind! What say ye to that, Roger?"

I said what was in my heart, and that was that I was ready for the task; nay, I was over-ready, as you may believe. So it was that presently Richford and I, with four other men, all of us armed to the teeth, went stealing out across the flat plain between us and the foothills, moving like wraiths in the night, and making for the point which Rodney had told us was the best at which to begin the ascent.

My heart pit-patted like the tattoo of a drum as I marched thus, and in my mind's eye I was viewing the unwritten chart, wondering whether, after all, I should be able to locate the landmarks of which Rodney had apprised me so many times.

We reached the hills at last, without accident, and began the ascent, having found the pass that Rodney had told us of, and, in single file now, since there was no room for more than one at a time, we made our way up the zigzag, winding track, rising higher and higher, and going as it were into the very heart of the mountain ridge.

Suddenly I cried aloud, and I at once knew that I had made a mistake, the mistake of having opened my mouth above a whisper, but not a mistake as to the thing which I had shouted.

"The Lion's Head!" I cried, and then left off at the quickly muttered word of Captain Richford.

THE FLAMING CROSS OF SANTA MARTA

Here must I confess, perhaps out of conceit or, maybe, out of an ignorance of the manner in which a tale should be told, here I must say that I confess to not having put down on these pages before some description of the chart which had been engraved upon Dan Rodney's chest.

"Sure you are that you be right?" Captain Richford said when I had finished my survey.

"Aye, as sure as man can be of anything!" I told him. "What next?"

"Back to the camp!" the captain said. "We will fetch the men up and get them to work while the moon is aloft. Thanks be that there be neither sighting of Dons nor that there has been any attempt to discover the treasure, which means that Don Enriquez has not yet got to work. Mayhap those frigates fell foul of Francis Drake!"

"Heaven grant that!" I said fervently, as we began to descend over the way we had come.

Reaching camp we gave the news, and all was quiet bustle, as the men filed out of the forest with scouts to the fore, since we were taking no risks at all.

Well indeed it was for us that Captain Richford had taken this precaution, for when the main body was halfway up the path the scouts came in like shadows in the night and reported news which set us, not only to thinking hard, but also to prepare ourselves for what we knew would be a fierce combat.

"Dons there be up there at the Lion's Head!" was

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the news they gave us. "They have come up the hillside from toward Santa Marta. There be mules with them, and every man is armed!"

"Would that I had the strength!" exclaimed Dan Rodney under his breath.

I knew what he meant. He would have given half the treasure to have been able to go with us into the fight for the sake of getting even with Enriquez. I bent over him as he lay in the litter.

"Dan," I said quietly, "never fear. Leave Enriquez to me. He shall pay dearly for what he has done to you!"

Then leaving men to guard Dan, the rest of us continued our march up the hill, quiet as the night itself, which quietness was broken presently when we were within a hundred yards of the bend in the path.

Sounds that came down to us were made by pick and spade, and I knew that without doubt Enriquez had read the riddle of the chart, which, truth to tell, was not altogether difficult.

Richford called a halt and whispered in my ear to follow him to reconnoiter. As I trod close upon his heels my heart was like to stop for very anxiety lest by a fallen step I should betray our presence. Nevertheless we came nearer to the bend with the moon throwing our shadows behind us. Sure, we threw ourselves upon our stomachs and crept up like panthers until we came to the bend, from which we could see what was in the doing.

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Full two score of men there were, and every one of them was wielding either pick or spade on the soft earth of the spurside.

I saw muskets piled against rocks and swords lying on the ground, and I could have chuckled with glee at the sight, since it meant that we might fall upon these unsuspecting Dons and rout them before they had time to recover their weapons.

A touch upon my arm made me turn, and it needed nothing more to cause me to turn and crawl back where we had left the men. A few muttered words of command, and then the whole band was creeping silently onward, confident of success. Then just as we reached the bend, disaster came in full. A man dropped his muskets; they exploded with a crash which seemed enough to wake the dead. Instantly there were shouts of alarm beyond and a sound of rushing feet, and above it all arose the voice of Captain Richford.

"On, men! St. George and merry England!" he cried, giving the English battle cry that had blown so often before on the Spanish Main. Then we were among them; pistols and muskets firing, and axe and pike and cutlass carving a way through the Dons, who had snatched up their weapons and were putting up a fierce defense.

Never shall I forget that fight! I flung my musket to the ground and had my father's cutlass flashing in the moonlight.

To add to the confusion, the Spanish mules had taken

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flight, and strangely enough, instead of scampering down the path, came mingling with the fight, and knowing not foe from friend, were as liberal in the use of their hoofs upon the Spaniards as they were upon us. A very giant of a Don, bare to the waist and wielding a great broadsword, came down upon us. I slipped me under his upraised arms, and my cutlass drove him away. Next instant, something struck me in the back and I went struggling forward, tumbling upon the body of my enemy. And not dead—despite his wound, he seized me with strong hands which, however, loosed their hold as my own first beat upon his face. When I had recovered somewhat from the blow I loosened myself from his grasp and sprang to my feet, regaining my fallen cutlass and springing round just in time to meet yet another foe. His face was in the shadow, but I knew him nevertheless. Knew him for Enriquez!

“At you! You villain! You dog!” I cried.

He laughed back at me as his long Toledo blade quivered like a snake’s fang and touched me on the right ear, thrust from my throat by a parry that my father had taught me.

Not a word more did either of us say, but we fought together as though we two alone were there, heedless of the battling men around us.

Far different was the man Enriquez found against him now from the boy who had fought him in the street at Plymouth, for I had grown strong of arm, and was more nimble of feet from much practice.

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Yet I knew that I had a foe who might not be taken lightly.

I put forth all the skill that I knew, and exclaimed with joy when I felt the point of my cutlass bite the man's right forearm. It was a cry that died away and became a gasp of pain, as, before I could recover myself, Enriquez had got his point in the shield and twirled my blade from my hand. And then he sprang and dealt me a fierce blow full upon the forehead with something that he had in his left hand. I felt myself falling, but ere I touched ground, something seized me. I was lifted bodily off my feet and then I forgot all things.

I awakened with the sense of an unusual motion. I had been bent forward, and the earth seemed to be moving past me. I strained myself up, and realized as I did so that I was on the back of some moving animal. A voice spoke to me from the side, and a hand grasped me by the shoulder.

"So you awaken!" a voice said, bringing my head from one side of the mule's neck to the other. I saw that Enriquez was riding another animal beside me.

"You thought to have outwitted me," he went on, "but you dogs of Englishmen are no match for gentlemen of Spain!"

I hurled his words back at him and then found that all my attention was needed to retain my seat upon the back of the mule. Now and again I glanced about me, questing for a sight of some of my com-

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panions, but not one of them could I see. Only just we two were there, riding across the moonlit plain. I wondered what evil plan was in the mind of Enriquez. It is not necessary for me to say that as I rode I was endeavoring to loosen the bonds about my wrists, but it was a thankless task, and at last I gave it up in despair. Enriquez laughed evilly, and smote me across the shoulders with his sword.

"It is not that way lies escape, Master Roger Hampsley," he told me with a sneer.

"Which way, then?" I asked him suddenly.

"In good time we shall know that," came back the words. And he slashed the mule across the withers, so that the animal increased its pace.

Silence then fell between Enriquez and myself, a silence that held until after many miles of traveling we came to the gates of a city, and where a Spaniard shouted out something in his own tongue, which I understood not the meaning, although I did soon guess it was a halt and a password, for presently a gate swung open and we entered through a stone archway.

I can remember now how strange I felt—strangely calm and somehow rather pleased—the which I do put down to the fact that there were none but Enriquez and myself who had come down from the hills; and I remembered how heavily the mules had been panting as though they had both been pushed hard on the way.

"It looks as though Enriquez just ran off with me!" I told myself, grinning a little, despite the

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parlous condition in which I knew I was. "And if that is so it must mean that he saw the fight was going against his own men and that our band would remain in possession of the field, and therefore of the treasure."

How far right I was in this I was to know soon, when I found myself standing in a well-lighted room with Enriquez, who had seen to the retying of the cords about my wrists, after I had been taken off the mule, saying something in Spanish to another man, and I marveled, aye, and shuddered at the light that gleamed in this man's eyes as he listened to what Enriquez was saying in English.

"So!" he said; and I swear that never did any man get more vehemence, more cruelty, into one brief word than that man got in that word "So!" as he rose to his feet and advanced towards me. "You are a friend of the man who stole the Flaming Cross, and you know where it is!"

I stared at him for a while boldly, but I confess that but for a moment did I stand thus; then I seemed to shrink within myself, as if I would hide from before the cruelty of his eyes, the evil of his lips. And I found not tongue with which to answer him. It seemed to anger him still more, and he slashed me across the face with the knotted end of the cord about his middle, so that I staggered back, and then, recovering myself, and, as by a miracle, regaining self-confidence, I sprang towards him, my trussed hands

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upraised as a man might have them in the wielding of a broadaxe. Enriquez leaped at me and dragged me away ere I reached the man, and, foiled of my object, I lashed out at the Don with my heavy sea-shoe, so that he went limping and yelping away. Then before I could do aught else, the man had lifted up his voice, and in answer half a dozen armed men, every one of them in armor, came rushing into the room, and I was flung heavily to the ground, face downwards.

"For that you shall—" Enriquez began, but his comrade hissed a warning as though he were afraid the Don should say anything too much.

"Listen, dog of an Englishman!" the man declaimed; and then he too stopped, brought to a halt by a loud knocking on the door. "Open it!" the man ordered.

One of the soldiers clanked across the floor and swung wide the door. Who entered I could not see, for my nose was rubbing the floor and my mouth buried in the skin mat on to which I had fallen. Also the words that were spoken were foreign to me, except here and there a word, which I pieced together and did understand that the man who had entered was one of those who had been to the hills, and the news he brought was that the Spaniards had been beaten, and he only of them all had managed to escape, and that therefore the Cross would be found by the Englishmen.

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Whereat, as you may guess, I was glad, though there happened things 'fore long to take somewhat of the edge off my pleasure.

For a while after the man was done speaking there was silence, and then my tormentor spoke; it was to me he spoke.

"Listen!" he said again, and there was vibrant passion in his voice. "You devil's whelp, who would defile the treasure of the Holy Church! Can you write?"

I answered him not, for I did understand the meaning behind the question, and did understand, too, the reason for Enriquez running off with me while yet the fight was on; they would use me, an they could, to obtain possession of the Flaming Cross!

But if I did not answer, Enriquez did for me.

"Aye, he can write," he said in English. "I have seen him at it while I was——"

"Playing spy aboard an English ship!" I found my tongue to mumble to him, where I lay scarce able to move my lips, whereat he spurned me with his foot.

"Then he shall write to those from amongst whom you brought him," the man said. "Set him upon his feet!"

I was hauled to my feet and stood, with a soldier on either side of me. The rascal looked at me as though he would spear me through with his eyes, and as if he hoped to make me quail before him again;

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but by now I had overcome my fear and returned his gaze unafraid.

“Never a pen will I to put to parchment at your dictation!” I told him.

I stepped back sharply as once more there came the swift movement of that knotted cord. It was as though anger lent strength to me, for how it happened I knew not, but as I stepped back, I jerked my hands apart and there came a sharp snap, the cord about my wrists broke and I was free.

Free? Nay, not free, but a prisoner having the movement of all his limbs, the which, with a swift bout of thinking, I did jump to the use of. I sprang, like a tiger on its prey, straight for that evil-faced villain, and my fists crashed one after t’other upon him, so that he went tumbling away from before me and overset a chair behind him, sprawling his length upon the floor. My quick eyes, the while I had stood, bound, on my feet, had seen a jeweled dagger on a table nigh at hand where the man had fallen, and quick as the lightning’s flash I had seized it, and was stooping over him with the dagger but an inch from his black heart.

“An either of you move towards me, he dies!” I told them, and I saw the looks of fear that spread over the faces of the soldiers.

One man only showed not that fear, and he was Enriquez. He stood, lithe as a tumbler at the play, as though ready to spring and take his chance and

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risk the life of his comrade; and his lips were curled in what I knew to be contempt for me—contempt for my threat and my boyish braggadocio in thinking that I could prevail.

I saw his hand move to his sword.

“Hold!” I cried.

To prove my mettle I pressed the dagger-point into the robe of the prostrate man and touched the flesh beneath, so that he cried in alarm lest I should finish the work. It was sufficient to give Enriquez pause, and I smiled up at him as I half-straightened myself. Yet though I smiled, I knew in my heart that I was playing a losing game: what could I do? How could I hope to escape, not merely from this room, but from the city outside? Something of the same thoughts, I knew, were running through the mind of Enriquez, whose body had lost the tension of a few moments before, so that he stood careless-like, and with an inscrutable smile upon his mouth as though he would say: “How long think you this can be done? And of what avail?”

Then he lifted up his head and looked beyond me, and I, like a dolt, did turn my eyes to follow the direction of his; the next instant he was upon me, and the dagger had gone flying from my hand as his sword-point slicked at my fingers. I had been tricked, as easily as one might trick a baby.

I think I must have gone mad in that moment, for I feared nothing—not even the shivering blade before

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me. I stepped aside slightly as he lunged at me, and stooping quickly, darted in under his guard, seized him about the waist and, for all his size, lifted him from his feet and flung him, as one might fling a rope-coil across a deck, full into the group of soldiers, and went bounding for the window not three yards from where I stood.

A rich window it was, as I do remember noticing even in that moment, when all I should have thought of was life and death. But, rich or poor, I cared not; I sprang me upon a chair beneath it, jerked an elbow at the lattice-work, saw the moonlight bathing a courtyard outside, and knew that the drop was short. And I jumped, carrying, I doubt not, much wealth of workmanship with me to the ground.

I laughed as I landed, which is a strange thing indeed, but there had crossed through my mind the memory of the way in which Enriquez himself had escaped us that day in the dealer's shop in Plymouth.

"I thank you for that example!" I muttered, as I picked myself up, and then was racing like the wind across the courtyard, towards a dark square in the wall that I knew must be a gate.

I reached it with howls of rage sounding behind me, and as I did so, it opened, a soldier's body stood half in half out as he was about to enter, no doubt to see what manner of commotion this was. It was not time for hesitance; I sprang for him, and had my hands about his unprotected throat, bearing him

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to the ground. I left him lying still and with his short sword in one hand and his pistol in t'other, I was through the gate, which I closed behind me.

"That much will give me breathing space!" I told myself, realizing that by having dragged the soldier outside and closing the portal, those within, when they entered the courtyard, would go seeking me inside, not thinking at least for a while that I had managed to get away.

I found myself in a street, narrow and with flat-roofed houses on either side, when once I was beyond the wall surrounding the courtyard—and I thanked me 'twas night, since there were no folk abroad—I wormed my way through street after street, going I knew not whither, meeting no one, nor wanting to!

And, as I walked, I heard of a sudden the loud tolling of a bell.

"The alarm, I doubt not!" I told myself, and quested about me for somewhere to hide.

Naught did I see to suit, except a dark alley, where I knew there might lurk as much danger as in the wider street. Yet I went me down it, for by now windows were opening, and doors.

On I went, with the ringing of the bell still in my ears. Alert, I gripped the sword, ready for whatever might come. At the end of the alley I saw another wider street, bathed in the moonlight, and hesitated, wondering whether to risk debouching into it. And

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as I wondered I heard the sounds of running feet, and saw dark forms flit by, going, I had no doubt, to learn the meaning of the call in the night. I retreated somewhat into the alley, afraid lest I might be seen by one of the passing folk, and yet, when the sounds of footsteps had died away, I went back again, peering out while safely hidden.

Little could I see, except straight ahead of me, and what I saw caused my heart to leap with hope within me. It was naught but a cart, piled high with something that I could not see the nature of, as though either it had been left there ready for the unloading in the morning, or for taking away; the which I could not know, neither did I care then. One thing only it meant to me at that moment, and that was, that if I might happily reach it unseen, I could perchance steal in amongst its goods and lay concealed for a while, at any rate until the dawn at least, when the search in the city might be ended, and it be supposed that I had somehow succeeded in getting beyond the city walls, the which I dared not attempt then.

I waited a while, breathless and silent, listening intently; and no sounds nigh at hand came to my ears. I peered out—risked a glimpse around either corner—and saw no one.

“’Tis now or never!” I murmured, and darted across the light-flooded street, coming up in the shadow of the cart on the farther side, and then began a hurried examination. I found the cart to be laden with

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bags, filled with I knew not what, and over them was a covering of canvas.

I climbed upon the wheel and lifted the canvas, wormed myself in beneath it and huddled down amongst the bags.

"So far 'tis good!" I muttered, and resigned myself to a night of watchfulness and listening. The bell had long since ceased tolling, and I wondered what was a-foot, the which I soon knew, for presently there were sounds of folks on the walk, and of much talking in excited tones, the words I understood little enough of, but sufficient to make me know that the search was going apace. I tell you, my masters, that I did tremble as I lay beneath that canvas. My hand gripped the pistol that it held; that at least should account for the first man who showed face at the canvas. I felt that the throbbing of my heart must be heard, aye, even the pulsing of my temples sounded to me like insistent calls to those who passed by.

"Dolt that I am!" I spoke in my mind. "'Tis no sure hiding place, but one in which the veriest fool would look!" And times there were when it did go hard with me not to spring out and trust to chance. Nevertheless I conquered the impulse that was on me, and lay still while folk passed and repassed, and the sounds presently died away.

And then I must have slept, despite my fears; perchance the strain had been too great upon me. And when I awoke, it was to imagine that I was aboard

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a ship at sea, for I was moving; then came to me the recollection of where I was, and I lay still and listened. What I heard served to give me confidence, for the sounds of the wheels and of the horse's hoofs was different from what common sense told me they ought to have been had they been on the city's cobbled streets.

With this in my mind I risked the lifting of the canvas, and peered out through the small opening I had made. Beyond, lay the grassy plain, with the sunlight streaming upon it, and neither house nor man in sight. Rough was the passage, and bumpy, so that I was buffeted about till my body was bruised and sore, but it mattered not to me. Sufficient was it that I was out of Santa Marta, that I was going farther away from it, that perchance, if the fates held on their kindly ways with me, I might effect an escape completely.

I wondered, how many men there might be with the cart, but although I listened for a long while I could hear no voices, as might have been the case, I told myself, an there had been more than one. Then I bethought me of the fact that it was not likely that a man should venture alone from the city, if he were going far, lest he be beset by Indians who, as I had been told, for all that they had been brought to heel by the Dons, were yet not backward in inflicting damage.

Such were my thoughts as I peered into the open,

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but presently I had other things of which to think. The rumbling, creaking wheels came to rest and I dropped the canvas, just when I had it in mind that I must be fashioning a plan for my escape. At the time when the cart on which I rode stopped, I heard sounds behind as of others stopping also, and realized for the first time that it was no solitary vehicle crossing the plain. I remembered some of the things that Dan Rodney had told me many a time, of how, for instance, it was the custom for stores trains to go between the towns and the mines, where the Indian, aye, and European prisoners, were forced to labor, at digging gold for the Dons; and I told myself that without doubt this was such a train.

"Coom oop, devil tak' the beast!" a voice said; and I almost jumped up in my astonishment at hearing the English tongue, and a Devon tongue at that. At the same time I heard a clanking of iron, a clanking that kept up and grew plainer to me as some one passed alongside.

"Vat ze matter?" this man asked; and again I wondered, for this was not an English tongue nor a Spanish that spoke, rather there was an accent of the French about it.

"These Dons work their beasts when they ought to be shot for dog's meat, Froggy!" the English voice said, in a low tone that I could only just hear. "This here mule have a yard-long blister on its leg and it burst. We—" the voice broke off, to give vent to a

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sharp cry of pain, and I heard a Spaniard say, in broken English :

“Fool! You hold the train! Take that!”

I knew what that was; it was the whir of a thong, and I heard the zip of it as it bit into something—the body of a man who yelped with the pain of it. Followed a snarling cry, and then an oath in Spanish, after which came shoutings of many men gathering at the cart. And out of all the hubbub I gleaned that the Englishman had struck a Spanish guard. What else happened then I could not tell, except that there was much of scuffling, which, when ended, was followed by a loud bellowing by the Englishman, a bellowing of curses and threats, and of entreaties, the reason for which I could not tell, and I dared not lift the canvas to look out.

Then I heard the rumbling of wheels begin again, and thought that very presently the cart in which I was hidden would begin to move, in which, however, I was mistaken. On either side I heard carts go past, as though they were sweeping out to get round, and then a voice spoke once more. It was that of the man who had abused the Englishman.

“Stay there, dog! Till the day after the morrow, when we will come back this way and moisten your lips and feed you, so that you live awhile longer, and then die! Food there is, as you know, in the cart, food that we cannot take with us for the rest are overfull. Little good can it do you! Bah—,” and I heard the

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dull thud as of a boot kicking a man's body, and heard, too, the repeated curses of the Englishman.

He shouted for a long while, but there came no answer, and at last he ceased his ravings, while I, who had not dared even to lift the cover until that moment, did risk the doing of it; and gasped as, raising myself a little, I looked out and saw a man lying on the ground, stretched out in the form of a cross, with his hands above his head and his legs, with chains on them, spread wide; and both legs and arms were fastened to strong stakes that were pegged to the ground. I saw the man writhing in his bonds, his body lifted off the ground and arched, and I wondered at the strength of him. I saw the veins on legs and arms standing out like whipcords, and his face was red with exertion. Yet no effect did he have on bonds or pegs; and presently he dropped back, cursing, to the ground.

"Left me, the fiends, the devils!" he raved. "Left me to die like a trapped rat!" I stuffed my fingers in my ears to deaden the sound of his cursing.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ENGLISH SLAVE

SLOWLY it came to me that with the stores train, if such it was, gone, I had a chance of escape. Then I thought again.

“Nay, not so quickly, Roger,” I muttered. “It be not safe yet; bide awhile.”

Not even did I announce my presence to the man on the ground, lest the cessation of his ravings should attract attention and bring the Dons back to see whether it meant that he had released himself. I must wait until they had had time to get far away, out of sound of the man’s voice, out of sight of him. I tell you that was an hour of agony, yet of strange pleasure; of agony lest through waiting I should be frustrated of my liberty through some one coming; of pleasure at the thought that there was possibility of escape.

It was an hour which ended by my lifting the canvas and shouting through the opening:

“Ahoy there, shipmate!”

Whereat the man on the ground—lying still at that moment, after another terrific attempt to free himself—jerked up his head, so that I thought he must dislocate his neck.

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"Who in heaven's name is there?" he cried; and dropped back as I squeezed through from under the canvas.

I stretched my cramped limbs and threw out my stiff shoulders before I spoke. I breathed deep of the air and laughed.

"By the Queen's ruffle!" panted the man. "You're——"

"The prisoner who escaped last night in Santa Marta!" I finished for him, reckoning that he likely enough knew of what had happened. In which I was right.

Whereat he laughed, and I rejoiced to hear a good hearty English laugh again.

I stooped over him and slashed at the ropes that held him, so that in a moment or so he was free, and able to stand upon his feet, although he still had the irons about his ankles.

"Who are you?" he demanded, and I told him my name.

"And you?" I asked, curiously.

"Bill—Bill Heade, out o' Plymouth!" he said. "Which I'll never see more! Five years have I been a prisoner and——"

"You're not one now, Master Heade!" I told him, with a smile, but he rattled the chains for answer.

"Much chance has a man wi' these on!" he said. "But whence came you?"

Now although he was English, aye, and of Devon,

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I did think it not wise to tell him too much, so I did content myself with saying that I had been one of a party which had landed, bent on plundering the Dons, and, being in fight in the hills, had been captured.

He looked at me with a grin.

“Nay, that be not all the truth,” he said. “I did hear the Dons whispering ’mongst themselves, and they spoke o’ the Flaming Cross, the Cross that every man on the Main has heard of at some time or other. But that is naught to me; what is much is, that there be an English ship somewhere, since you came not walking across the sea! Where did ye land, eh?”

I told him as far as I could, and the effect was astonishing.

“Lad,” he said, eagerly, “an I could get these chains off I would hurry with you to the hills and so to the coast, for I know that same bay where ye landed! Haply, the ship be there still. Hast aught of a file, eh?”—this he asked me as if ’twere natural a man should carry a carpenter’s shop about with him!

“Nay,” I told him. “How far is it to the coast?”

“A day’s march to the hills,” he said, “and thou knowest how far from there to the bay, since you came thence.”

We examined the mule’s leg, and it was indeed bad, but even so the beast, I could see, would be able to carry us at a quicker pace than we could hope to keep up if we were both walking. By taking turns on his back, and the other running, we could shorten the day’s jour-

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ney to the hills by many hours. So, having decided that, we slit open a bag in the cart and took from it food sufficient to last us, as we thought. We filled our pockets with it, and slung each a bag we made of canvas on our backs, and then at my demand Heade got on the mule, sitting as a woman sits on a horse, because of his chains.

Thus we set off, Heade acting as guide, and made good progress indeed, despite the animal's sickness. We took our rides by turns, and we knew that we had been right in our choice, because long ere the sun set we were at the foot of the hills, having met no one, although I had had it in my mind that there was a chance that the Spaniards might have sent out soldiers from Santa Marta to make examination of the scene of the last night's fighting.

We were men a-thirst indeed by this time, and half senseless men at that, when we at last reached the hills.

"There be water in the hills," said Heade. "Come, we'll go find it! 'Tis five years since I was here, lad, but I can see the hill stream even now as I saw it then!"

The news was good to me, but that the very thought of water being near served to make my thirst greater. Presently Heade gave a muffled shout, and started running as best he could for the chains at his ankle.

"'Tis here—'tis here!" he cried; and I sprang me from the back of the mule and raced after Heade, coming up with him when his head was sunk in the cool running water from the hill. I knelt beside him and

drank as a man might drink of nectar and I do swear that never did nectar taste more sweet than that water.

Bill Heade breathed like a man who had attained all that he had ever hoped for in life; he smacked his lips; he dripped the water through his fingers, and he laughed.

“Ah,” he said, “ ’tis good, lad—’tis exceedin’ good, eh?”

I was too busy to answer him, but presently got to my feet, unhitched the water skin that hung at my side, and stopping again, filled it.

“ ’Twill serve us well, Bill Heade!” I told him. “Let the mule drink!”

We did so, and after that I fell to washing the beast’s wound, cleaning away the festered matter and, tearing my shirt, did bind a clean wet bandage about the leg, and I’ll swear that brute looked his gratitude.

“The next thing is the pass, Heade,” I said, quietly. “We’ll find that ’fore it’s right dark, eh?”

He nodded, and leading the mule now, we set off, Heade in the van, and presently we came to the foot of the pass, and in my mind’s eye I could see far back to those days when Dan Rodney and his companions had come with the mule train laden with the treasure of Santa Marta, and begun the ascent, only to have to turn and do battle for their lives and their loot. I could imagine the scene, for had I not lived through one up there on the hill? I laughed as I thought of it—laughed as I thought of the discomfiture of Don En-

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riquez away there in Santa Marta; and I wondered, as we set foot in the pass, what would be his next move? Had he come, at the head of more soldiers, this way, in the hope of catching up with the men of the *Seeker of Pleasure*, before they reached the coast? Or, would he get down to the coast below Santa Marta and embark in the ship that had brought him thither and try to cut out the *Seeker of Pleasure*?

“Mayhap, there be all those five frigates with him!” I told myself, and thereat grew alarmed for Richford’s ship.

Strange I do now know it to be that, while thinking thus the thought came not to me about my own danger—the danger that when I reached the coast I might be too late for the *Seeker of Pleasure*, and so be left stranded on this inhospitable shore, with Bill Heade only for companion, and beset by dangers the nature of which I could not tell. It was, in truth, some time ere I bethought myself of this, and then fell morose.

Then a new thought came to me; I told myself that when my comrades missed me, and found me not either amongst the dead or the wounded, they would know that I had been spirited away since it was not likely I should run me away from them; and I knew that when Dan Rodney heard that news, an he did hear it at all, he would refuse to leave the coast until he knew somewhat of my fate. I trusted Dan Rodney for that, and doing so, took fresh heart.

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From such thoughts as these was I roused by the whispering voice of Bill Heade.

"Roger Hampsley," he said, "there be things I like not; men and horses have passed this way!"

"Aye," I told him, "'twas up this pass that Enriquez came last night and——"

"Fie!" snapped Heade. "There have been passers-by since then. Look ye!"—and he pointed to signs that were on the hard ground, the which I myself must have seen an I had not been so taken up with my own thoughts. "We must go careful-like, lad! I wish we'd ne'er brought this mule—it's like to be somewhat of a nuisance to us!"

"'Tis done, now," I said. "Who knows, it may be of service, even yet! Listen, Bill Heade: I'll go me on a little way, making search, while you do bide here—there's space behind that boulder where mule and man might hide and not be seen by any one passing by."

I'll have you know that 'twas moonlight by now, and that we were halfway up the pass—halfway, that is, to where I judged was the spot that was the hiding place of the Flaming Cross, and it came to me that perchance the signs we had seen were those made by a party from Santa Marta gone up to examine the ground, and see if the English had succeeded in unearthing the treasure and, were that so, to pursue them towards the coast. Had I reflected somewhat, I should have told myself that they would at least not be there now, for Don Enriquez was not one to let grass grow beneath his feet;

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he would be off in the morning, not long, mayhap, after my escape.

But at the time I had but one thought, and that to avoid falling into ambush, so that I left Bill Heade, who agreed with me, and went my way up the pass, walking as a cat might walk in the stalking of a mouse. Silent was the night, and still, and sound would have traveled far—the which served me in good stead, for it meant that I would be able to hear well in advance anything taking place higher up before me. Naught, however, did I hear, and so came unmolested and undisturbed to the place where stood, grim and amazingly lifelike, with the moonlight etching it in the night, the lion's head, carved by some freak of nature out of the solid rock.

I trembled as I saw it, not of fear, but of wonder whether the purpose of our mission had been fulfilled; and I stared about me in amongst the strange shadows flung by the moon's light, picking out at last the cleft which I knew from my memory of the chart had been marked by the cross on Dan Rodney's chest. I strode towards it and looked down. And a great boulder stood on the edge of a deep hole below, and I knew that some one had delved and found the treasure!

And as I stood there, staring into the hole, I felt that I would have given my right hand to have known whether Don Enriquez or Dan Rodney had been the discoverer!

I scrambled up from the cleft down which once, for many years, had lain hidden the treasure and the Cross

of Santa Marta, and hurried me back to where I had left Bill Heade.

"Well, lad?" he asked me, and I told him what I had seen. "Then we can go thus far," he suggested, when I had finished. "From there, we'll make careful journeying, and I fear me we must travel only in the night."

I did agree with him, but I knew that once on the plain we should be able to travel much more quickly than when our party had come from the shore, since now we had the mule on which one of us could ride at a time. So we went together up the hill, passed the denuded cleft, and Bill Heade picked up a discarded shovel as he passed. "'Twill make a weapon," he said grimly; and then we began the descent on the other side, I going far in advance, and Bill Heade taking care to subdue the clanking of his chain as he walked. In such fashion, without accident, did we reach the plain, and afar off the forest loomed black and forbidding—aye, forbidding, although we knew that 'twas a hiding place for us for the next day. Straight towards it we made, I insisting that Bill should take the first turn upon the mule, which, now that its leg had been dressed, though clumsily, was able to move more rapidly.

In a measure, our reaching the forest over-early, compared with when we should had we to have walked, was upsetting, since to me it was a sore temptation to push ahead during the remaining night hours. Bill Heade it was who curbed my impatience.

"Nay, lad," he said. "I know this land, and there's

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no shelter, for many and many a mile, as you must know, too, since you came this way! Fools we'd be to go now and have nowhere to hide during the day, and mayhap, run into the Dons, for of a certainty, they've gone this way, and have not yet come back!"

It was wisdom that he spoke, and I knew it; but I was a restless body that early morning, and during the next day as we lay in the shelter of the forest, having hitched the mule to a tree. By rare good luck we found us a tiny streamlet which served us well. We took it in turns to sleep, for we had got not far into the forest, preferring to remain on the edge of it so that we might be able to see or hear if the Dons went by.

Impatience, I do think, does make a fool of a man; it made a fool of me that day. It was towards evening, and Bill Heade was asleep, the last watch, ere we set forth again, falling to me.

Yet naught happened to disturb us, except the calls of animals in the night, and the close passing of them during the day. Then came the evening, and having drunk our fill of the water, and given the mule what it would have, we set off once more on the last stage of the journey to the coast, I taking my bearing from the stars. For hours we went on thus, feeling happy at the thought that ere the light came again we might be gazing upon the *Seeker of Pleasure*.

"Five years—aye, five years!" mumbled Bill Heade to me. "Five years since I was free, and then 'twas I came along this same way. Lad, I'll ne'er forget yes-

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terday! 'Twas the luckiest thing a man ever did when I struck that dog of a Don, else by now I'd 'a' been in the mines! And now I'm free—free——”

“Not yet, Bill Heade!” I said quietly. “There be many a slip 'twixt cup and lip, as y'know! Suppose that the *Seeker of Pleasure* be gone—what then?”

It was the first time I had voiced the thought to him, and he pulled up sharply as he sat on the mule.

“By th' Lord Harry!” he exclaimed. “I'll tell ye I ne'er thought o' that, lad! Why, 'twould mean——”

And then he broke off of a sudden, and I, holding on to his leg as I had been doing while running alongside, stared with him into the night, and listened with ears agog.

For, carried on a slight breeze, there came to us the sound of hoofs—the hoofs of galloping horses. I tell you I trembled, and my heart beat fast as I listened.

Suddenly Bill Heade swung the mule's head round and whispered:

“Come on, Roger!”—and off he went, with me at his side, on an oblique line, coming to a halt presently.

Acting on Heade's advice, I threw myself flat on the ground. He, too, after having made the mule lie down, did the same, and so we lay, staring with scarcely lifted heads into the night, and with the dull thudding plainly to be heard in our ears. We knew that the sounds were made by a large body of horsemen, of that we were certain. Sure, too, were we that they could not be our friends. Of a certainty they must be men from

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Santa Marta in whose tracks we had been following from the hills.

"What means it?" I whispered to Bill Heade, as though he ought to know, but he grunted a command to me to be quiet.

"I'm not wantin' more spell in th' mines!" he said thickly.

I held tongue, knowing the danger of it all, and realizing what capture meant to me. Mines—aye, it meant worse than that for me, an I read aright the look in Enriquez's eye. And I shuddered as I thought of what that fiend of a familiar might have in store for me, an he got me in his clutches again.

Came presently, after what seemed like a month's journeying of the sun, the sight for which we had been waiting. Clearly to be seen in the moon's light rode a squadron of horsemen, their armor gleaming like silver, while their spears caught the light and glistened. They galloped on until they came level with us, and then passed forward over the way we had gone—only to come to a confused halt as there arose the baying of a hound—a sound which chilled the blood in my veins and well nigh made my heart stay in its beating.

"The dogs—the dogs!" I heard the lowest of whispers from Heade.

Low as it was, I sensed a terror in the tone—a terror which I did not understand for a while. Then—I dared not speak with him—I did come to know; that company of men and horses out yonder suddenly began to move

again, and when it did, it was coming towards us with strange leaping forms in the van of it.

"The dogs—the dogs!" came Heade's awed voice again, and he laid a hand upon my arm, a hand that had the grip of a vise in it. "Lad—'tis the end."

Bemused, I could not speak for a while, and it was only when Heade got him to his feet, and had the mule scramble erect that I found my tongue.

"Whither away, Bill?" I asked.

"Nowhere for me, but for you—lad, spring astride and go as fast as the brute can carry ye!"

"Never!" I told him, swiftly. "'Tis stay with you and fight, aye, to the last breath."

"Sorry a fight indeed 'twill be!" he said, but it was in no bemoaning voice he spoke. "A boy with a sword, a man with a one-shotted pistol and a shovel. Shake hands on it, Roger!"

So we shook, and then stood us side by side, ready for the moment that came with swift suddenness. A baying hound leaped out of the moonlight, and Heade's shovel crashed at its skull, splitting it open, and next instant I had run my sword full into the broad chest of a second dog. It was a sword too big for me, and I missed the easy handling of my father's cutlass, but nevertheless I found it useful.

As I drew the blade out I heard the sharp report of a pistol and sensed rather than saw that Bill Heade had fired, and fired well, for there came a clatter, and then mingled oaths and jangle of steel. I saw a horse go

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to his knees and several others crash into it as, unable to stop in their rush, they had found the obstacle before them. Then a moment or so later, the Dons were upon us, and in the moonlight I saw, even as I brought my sword down and sent a man's hand flying from its wrist, the face of my enemy Enriquez. I saw him draw rein slightly as he recognized me, and, above the jangle of voices, and above the crash of Heade's shovel as it struck on steel armor, I heard Enriquez's voice:

"Rodney's whelp! Take that boy alive!"

I laughed shrilly at him.

"Come take him yourself, you rogue!" I cried.

I slashed at a horseman who had driven full at me with his lance couched and knocking away the lance I up-cut at the arm and the man yelped with the pain as he sped past me, Bill Heade bringing his shovel down upon the horse's withers as it went by.

They encircled us about, and it was almost laughable to see how, instead, after that first onset, they refrained from driving down upon us. Had they done so, nothing could have saved us alive, but I knew that it was because of Enriquez's command that they did not crush us, nor fire pistol or musket.

"Surrender!" came Enriquez's voice, and again I laughed back at him.

It seemed to infuriate him, and he issued from the circling Dons as though he would ride down upon me, the which I could have asked nothing better. But he went back, and I taunted him. For answer, he sud-

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denly shot from the band again and rode down upon me so that I was hard put to it to escape the sweep of his sword as he passed. I did so, however, and then saw Enriquez sway in his saddle as Bill Heade's pistol, that he had flung at him, struck the man on the side of the skull. Then I was springing like a hind, and my sword rang as it struck the armored arm of the Don. But it was a hopeless encounter; Enriquez pulled at his rein, his horse reared and the hoofs that went up came down and smote me upon the chest so that I fell to the ground. Conscious I was, but with the breath pounded out of me, so that I was still lying there when Enriquez, springing from his steed, stood over me with his lance pointed at my throat.

CHAPTER XIV

PUT ON THE RACK

AS in a dream I heard the roaring of a man's voice, and the thump of feet on the ground, and I knew that it was Bill Heade come to the rescue. But Heade never reached my side—a babel of voices drowned his, and a moment or so later I heard the death-scream of the man who had thought himself free. Free? Aye, he was free now, and never more would he toil in the mines to fill the coffers of the Dons.

For myself, I tried to rise, but the lance-point held me down, and Enriquez snarled at me:

“You are caught, my young coxcomb, and there's no escape this time!”

He shouted something in Spanish which brought men up to him to whom he gave commands, the purport of which I knew all too well, for I was jerked to my feet and my sword knocked from my hand, a cord was tied about my wrists behind me, and, with my ankles bound, too, I was flung across the cropper of Enriquez's horse like a sack of offal.

I tell you, my masters, I wept with chagrin—wept at the cruel twist of fate's wheel that had brought me to this pass just when I had thought the end of trouble

might be come to. I knew that I was in desperate plight indeed, for there would be no mercy for me at the hands of Enriquez and his cruel companions. Almost I found myself cursing the day that I had first met Dan Rodney; almost I called down the curse of heaven upon the Flaming Cross of Santa Marta, that had brought me to such a sorry pass; and I found myself lamenting the fool that I had been in not having killed this rogue Enriquez when we were together on an English ship.

I writhed as I lay across the horse, and the animal shied in its stride, so that Enriquez, with an oath, struck me on the side of the head with something that felt like the fall of a mast upon me, and I dropped into kindly insensibility.

How long I remained thus I do not know, but as it was I awoke to find myself staring up into a sunlit sky, and to hear the chatter of men's tongues, and the champ of horses. Looking about me I saw that the Dons were busy at eating, and realized that they had halted awhile on the journey.

I scanned their faces, looking for Enriquez, and him I found in due course, sitting apart from the rest, with a scowl upon his face—a scowl which deepened when he saw that I was awake. He got him to his feet and stepped over towards me, spurning me with his foot when he came to my side.

“Sit up, you dog!” he growled, but I lay and looked up at him, whereat he kicked me again.

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"An you loose these hands of mine and put a sword in them, I'll take vengeance for that coward's kick!" I mouthed at him, whereupon he struck me across the mouth and the blood spurted from my lips.

"Sit up, dog, I say!" he told me.

When I still did not move, he pulled me up on to my feet where I stood staring at him, with the Spaniards about gazing wonderingly upon me, and I could read that they marveled at my spirit in defying my captor. "If you would live, answer me these questions," he told me fiercely, thrusting his evil face into mine.

"Naught will I answer now, any more than when you and your familiar would have had me speak," I told him quietly. "So waste not your breath!"

I did think that he would strike me again, and I jerked me back a little, whereat he laughed.

"Methinks I'll find ways to loosen that tongue of yours, an you do not answer freely," he said. "Now, tell me, you dog, whither goes that ship on which you came when it leaves the coast, or where they worked for?"

"So they have gone?" I asked him, half gayly, though 'twas but a cloak for my feelings, since my heart sank within me at the news; the *Seeker of Pleasure* had gone, and even had I reached the coast it would have been to find myself stranded, as I thought might be the case.

"And the treasure and the Cross with them?" I taunted

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him. Even in my own despondency I could not forbear doing that. "Much good has your plotting done!"

Enriquez was like a mad wild man as he stamped his foot, and his eyes blazed at me, his hand gripped his sword hilt and I braced myself for the blow that should ease me of all my troubles. But it came not. Instead, his lips curled with a devilish smile before which I do confess I quaked.

"Whither go your friends?" he demanded again, and still kept silence.

Then he began with threats and bullying, with blows and with curses, to try to get me to tell him—aye, he even tried hypocritical pleading, and made wide promises of safety and freedom, the which I did not trust, and for which I would not have told him one word, even had I known, which I did not, whither the *Seeker of Pleasure* was going. There had been naught said amongst us on the ship as to what should happen after the treasure was recovered, though I did have it in my mind that haply Richford might go seeking Drake's fleet and join it in the cruise, if his men were not too glutted of adventure and too anxious to get them home to the spending of the wealth they had acquired.

This much, however, I did not tell Enriquez, either of my ignorance or of my thoughts, and I found joy in watching his impotent fury.

Impotent, did I write? I was to know ere long that the man had power—power of life and death—aye, power of worse than death itself. When he at last did

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find that I was not to be bullied or cajoled into speech, he thrust me from him with a cruel blow, and shouted an order which brought his men to horse, and presently, we were going across the plain, making a detour of the hills, the horses being put to the task at utmost speed, as if Enriquez had engaged in a race against time.

And so we went, coming at last within sight of the white-walled town of Santa Marta, that I had not seen in daylight before. I picked out its church gleaming in the sun, and shuddered as I thought of what awaited me there—audience, I doubted not, of that berobed familiar, who would take pleasure in his revenge on me for the handling I had given him—aye, and make me pay for the breaking of *that* rich window through which I had hurled myself!

The great gate opened when we reached the walls, and we passed through into the street, and so, between lines of watching people, to the church. Outside the courtyard surrounding it the soldiers were drawn up right and left, the while that Enriquez, with me flung still across the saddle, went inside. There, rough hands pulled me from my place and set me upon my feet. Enriquez dismounted and prodded me forward with the point of his sword.

“On, dog!” he rapped at me, and I was fain to obey.

In through a nail-studded door I was driven, along a dim passageway, and so into a room lighted then only by the sun’s rays that came in rare coloring through the rich windows, except that there was a

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splash of white light to one side, where the sounds of men working attracted my attention, and I laughed shortly as I recognized the room and saw that the men were engaged on mending the window that I had broken when I had made the escape that had proved all so much futile effort, since I was back once more, a prisoner.

It was as though our coming had been heralded, for scarcely had we entered the room, Enriquez and I, than a door opened almost noiselessly at the farther end, and I saw a man walking towards us with catlike tread and hands folded across his chest. I do remember how my blood seemed to curdle as I remembered the evil that had shone in the man's eyes that night when I had seen him before. There came to me the memory of many things the which my own father had told me of how the men of the Inquisition wrought evil in the name of God, and I had it in my heart that with free hands I would have encircled them about this man's throat. But I was powerless and I knew it—I knew, too, when the priest stood in front of me and gazed down upon me with the thin, tight-pressed lips bearing witness to the evil in his soul—that I was like a caged bird which might break its wings upon the wires and exhaust itself in futile efforts for liberty.

“So you have come back!”

The words were snarled through the man's lips after a while of gazing upon me, and the smile that accompanied them frightened me, though I resolved not to show it.

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Then he spoke something to Enriquez which I did not understand, and Enriquez answered him, whereupon by the look on the man's face I did gather that it had been question and answer about the success of the expedition to the coast. In which I was proved right, very presently.

"Then this rogue shall tell us what we would know!" the man rasped in English.

"That I have tried and failed," Enriquez replied in the same tongue. "'Tis of no use, the gentle method."

"Then will we try other ways," was the reply, and the laugh that issued from his throat sent chilly shudders down my limbs. I watched the man step aside a little and tug at a rope hanging down the wall, then I heard the clang of a bell and knew that he had rung for some one else to come.

I waited, wondering greatly what was afoot.

Then another door opened, this time behind me, and I turned me around sharply and cowered from what I saw.

It was a man, indeed, but all too little like a man, and too much like what the mind might fashion a devil's shape into. Short he was, with arms that hung below his knees, the which were bent outward as though they could scarce uphold the stoutly built body of him. A great beard dropped from his chin on to his chest, and shaggy brows half smothered the eyes, which, nevertheless, gleamed horribly in the half light of the room.

He walked, nay, almost groveled towards the Inquisi-

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tor, crossing himself as he did so, and the man said something to him which brought a spreading grin to his mouth which, opening, revealed two yellow teeth—teeth that were more like fangs indeed. Then answering back, he stepped towards the door through which he had entered, keeping his face to the priest as he did so.

“Follow him, dog!” came Enriquez’s voice, as his sword pricked my tied hands.

I hesitated; the sword touched me again and brought a short cry of pain from me, and I swung me round with blazing eyes upon my tormentor, who laughed at me and, ’fore I knew it, had stroked my chin with his blade. Bound as I was I flung myself forward, but the shimmering blade was between my eyes, and I turned and fell full into the outstretched arms of the evil-looking dwarf.

Those arms! They were strong, I’ll vow, as if they had been made of steel, and they crushed my bound arms to my sides, and I fancied me I heard my ribs crack beneath the strain. I was like a babe indeed, for that stunted rogue picked me up bodily and carried me struggling though I was, out through the door, with Enriquez and priest following us; and I could hear the taunting, mocking laugh of Enriquez.

Down a long passage we went until we reached a door, where the dwarf stooped and Enriquez the Inquisitor pressed by to open it. I lashed out with my bound feet and that irreverent rascal cursed me loudly,

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so that I laughed, for I knew that I had struck him truly and well, though where, I could not tell.

Then the door was swung upon rusty hinges, as I could hear, and we went in; then down another passage and, despite my continued struggles, down steps until we came to what I judged was an underground chamber, from the smell of it. Lights there were here, the lights of torches stuck in the wall as I did see when I was set upon my feet, and a great fire blazed at one end of the chamber.

Like fiends in a devil's pit, forms rose up as we entered, and moved towards us, and I shuddered as they came, for never did man set eyes on more evil-looking men than these; and from somewhere beyond came the baying of a hound—the call of a dog for food, and I knew aught of such things.

“Speak—or 'tis the rack!” said Enriquez suavely. “'Tis the last chance that we shall give you!”

That which I do now write, I write without shame, nor care what men may think. I had heard of the rack—had heard of men stretched upon its infamous bed of agony until their very limbs did come from their sockets; aye, I had heard, too, of men whose feet had been slashed with the canes until madness had seized them, and of men whose flesh had been seared with red-hot irons, and their eyes scorched in their sockets. Small wonder, then, that my erstwhile courage oozed from me like water from a wrung shirt.

“Not that,” I cried. “Not that!”

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“Speak, then!” came the gloating reply from Enriquez, who seized me roughly by the arm and swung me round so that my eyes were staring into his. “Whither go your companions, and how many ships have they?”

“One ship there is,” I told him, cringing from him, but held tightly in that viselike grip, so that I winced at the pain of it. “One ship—but I know not whither it goes!”

“You lie—you lie!” he screamed at me, shaking me as a dog shakes a rat. “You know, but you will not tell. Think not to deceive me! Speak!”

“I tell you I know not!” I exclaimed, whereat he raised his voice, at which those devil’s pawns flung themselves upon me and lifted me, carried me across that hell-chamber, my cries ringing through it, and forced me down upon something, I knew not what. And held me there—held me there while I felt hands loosening the bonds about my ankles, and then other bonds were fastened to them, so that I could not move either leg an inch. Then my hands were served in like manner, and I lay staring up at the earthen roof above me, with a dull dread in my heart.

I heard a creaking, and wondered what it meant. Then presently I felt a straining of my limbs, and I knew. I screamed with the terror of it; of pain there was none yet, but I seemed to feel it nevertheless, before it came. And when it came, I screamed more wildly, so that I drowned the scornful laugh of Enriquez,

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whose face was close to mine, the eyes of it gloating over me in my agony.

“Speak!” he said, hoarsely; and at his word it came to me that I might save myself this horror. I did not know that which he would have had me tell him, but—I could lie, and heaven would forgive a man who lied in such circumstances.

“Ease you this torture!” I panted. “And I will speak.”

“Nay, speak now!” was the cruel answer. “Whither goes the ship? Aye, and what is its name?”

“It goes—to meet Drake and Hawkins. Its name is the *Seeker of Pleasure*,” I lied. “For pity’s sake ease me!”

For answer, that fiend said something to the torturers and the pain increased, I knew what was in his mind. He thought that an I were lying he would force me to retract and speak the truth. But, not so was I to be trapped, even in that my agony, and I screamed that ’twas the truth indeed I spoke, whereat, he spoke again, and it did seem to me that my whole body sagged like a bundle of boneless flesh. The winch of the rack flew back and the strain ceased all at once—too soon, indeed, so that the agony of release was almost as bad as the pain of the stretching.

I felt myself drifting into a darkness, though I knew that my eyes were still open. Then I strained as though I would keep awake to know what meant the shouting that I heard:

“El Inglesh—El Inglesh!” The words were shouted by some one whom I could not see, and I do think that they served to recall me from the stupor into which I was falling. I looked again and saw a strange man run to where Enriquez and the Inquisitor stood. He mouthed strange things at them, whereat, the two did go hurrying from the chamber, leaving me where I was, with those fiends of torturers about me.

A great chattering there was amongst them, the which I understood but little of, though I strained my ears, and presently did smile through my pain. For, by a word here and there did I gather something that sent the blood coursing through my veins at great speed, and I could have shouted with the joy of it.

That shouted warning—for warning I now knew it to be—of the man who had blundered in, had meant that there were English advancing on the city, and the few words I did manage to pick out of all the chatter of the Spanish tongues told of a goodly number.

Aye, I could have shouted for very joy, I say; for it meant but one thing to me—Richford had not forsaken me. He had come to quest for me in Santa Marta. Then, as I thought, a new idea came to my mind; mayhap it was not Richford, but Drake himself—Drake bent on sacking Santa Marta, and not knowing aught of my presence there. What if he had come over the hills, and, using the chart that I had scrawled for him, had found the place of the hidden treasure—but not the treasure; and thinking that some-

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how the Dons at Santa Marta had discovered the secret of it, resolved to sack the city?

Which of these two things were the truth, I knew not. Neither did I care. All that mattered to me was that there were Englishmen advancing on Santa Marta, and soon I should be free.

CHAPTER XV

THE SACKING OF SANTA MARTA

DESPITE the hope that lived in my breast at the thought of the coming of the English force, the hours that I lay in the torture chamber, still on the rack, for those fiends made no attempt to release me, were filled with no little terror for me. The very presence of the torturers was horrible. Anon, they would come and stare at me with their evil eyes, and show their yellow teeth, and leer and jeer, and, as if it gave them pleasure, turn the winch of the rack and give me a twinge of pain. When they left me, I could, by raising my head, though it caused me agony, see them in the far corner sitting about the fire, drinking from large bowls, and their raucous voices were lifted up in what, I doubted not, were vile songs, the which I was glad I knew not the meaning of.

Yet even above their rowdiness, ever and anon there came to me the muffled roar that, from experience, I knew was the sound of gunfire; and I lay wondering how things were going up above. Strange it was to me that these men should take so little heed of it all; it was as though they felt themselves safe—as though they believed that the Dons would be able to drive off the

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attackers, and at the thought I shivered with apprehension, and found myself mumbling prayers as I had not done for many a day.

How long I lay thus, I knew not; it seemed as though days went by, yet it could have been but a few hours before I heard a sound as of a door being burst open unceremoniously behind me, then the quick padding of feet on the earthen floor. A voice spoke—and I knew it for that of Enriquez; at the sound of it the dwarfs got staggeringly to their feet and crowded about him, but he thrust them aside, and soon he was standing above me.

“That, for a liar!” he screamed, and struck me a full-handed blow on the face. “You spoke of one ship—there were more, and their men are swarming through the town. Ho—ho!” And at the call the dwarfs came towards him. He spoke to them, and next moment I knew what it was he had said. I felt the strain begin on my limbs again, and grow until I thought that I must die with the pain of it. But there was worse to come. My half-blind eyes, dulled with the pain of it all, were suddenly confronted with something that glowed in the gloom, and, opening them, I saw a redness before me—a redness that burned without touching. It came nearer and nearer, like some vile beast of prey in the night, torturing me with its scorching . . . bringing screams from my well-nigh bursting lungs and parched throat.

And then it dropped away, the man who had held

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it screamed himself, but why, I knew not then, for I had fainted.

When I came to, it was to find myself lying on a comfortable bed that seemed to me like heaven; and, opening my eyes, I shut them again quickly, for the light was painful. And there came back to me the memory of that red thing that had seemed to be eating my sight from me. I shuddered as I thought of it, and opened my eyes again. Only dimly could I see, as though there were a film across my vision, but I could see a vague form at my side, and stretched out a hand as though I would ward off some unknown danger.

“La, Roger!” a voice said, and a hand seized mine. And the voice was the voice of Dan Rodney.

“Dan!” I sobbed—and broke me out into tears which made my poor eyes smart.

Dan held my hand tightly and let me weep, and I felt no shame for the doing so. He spoke no word until I had at long last composed myself, and then he said softly, almost crooningly, as a mother might to a sick child:

“Roger—thank God you live, and that we were in time!”

I opened my eyes again, and it seemed as though the tears had served to heal them somewhat, for I could make out his bearded face more clearly, and saw something of his look as he gazed upon me, and thanked heaven for a goodly friend.

“Tell me!” I asked. “Tell me—where are we? The

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fight—how went it? The treasure—the Cross?”

“A-many a question, Roger!” Dan said, with a soft laugh. “’Twould take long in the answering of them. But an you’d know where we be, ’tis in Santa Marta—lording it over the villain Dons who remain—though most be fled. The men of ours be now sacking the place, and from all reports there do be goodly treasure!”

“But the Cross?” I asked insistently.

“Lad, we have it on the *Seeker of Pleasure!*” Dan told me simply. “Some other time I’ll tell the tale. Wouldst know how came it we’re here? Aye, I see you would. Then listen.”

And he began to tell me of what had happened since last I had seen him. The fight in the hills had gone all against the Spaniards, many of whom had been killed, and the rest captured, or so Dan thought until I told him of the man who had brought the news to Santa Marta. Prisoners who had been taken, on being questioned, had, under pressure, told that he who had led them to the hills had been Enriquez, and a search had been made for him. He was nowhere to be seen, and then it was discovered that I was missing too. I was not to be found among either killed or wounded, and no man had seen the going of me; whereupon, the patching of the tale had been done and it was decided that I had somehow been spirited away by Enriquez; only my father’s cutlass was found to show that I had been disarmed, at any rate. Men had been sent on to the plain on mule back,

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but had seen no trace of a fugitive, and had come back to report thus. In the meantime, the search for the treasure had begun; men went down the great cleft, and by many hours of labor moved the big rock from where it had lain these many years, and then dug deep into the earth until they came to the bags that held the treasure looted from Santa Marta.

Dan had been carried to the spot, and he lay and watched the bags being brought up, every one of them being placed before him that he might look for the mark on that which held the Flaming Cross. And, at last, it had come up.

"I ripped it open, lad," he told me, with the light of triumph in his eyes; "and took out the great red Cross. The rubies flashed in the moon's light—and the men gazed on it with awe, while the Spaniards, who were prisoners, cried aloud when they saw it. I tell you, Roger, 'twas a rare moment for me—and I could have shouted wi' the joy of it an it had not been that you were not there! Lad, I thought that I had lost you!"

"And I, you," I told him softly. "But what then?"

"Why, Roger, we got together what of the mules the Spaniards had brought that we could," he said, "and loaded them with the bags. Captain Richford scrawled a message with a charred stick on a piece of wood, and stuck it in the ground to tell Enriquez, an he came that way again, that the Flaming Cross had gone from him forever, and vowing that we would have Francis Drake fall upon him ere long and get you from him!"

“You did that!” I exclaimed, and pressed the hand that held mine. “No wonder he thought I lied when”—and I shuddered as I thought of it—“when I lay on the rack and told him that there was one ship only. But, go on, Dan, my tale will wait!”

“We went us back to the coast and got aboard the *Seeker of Pleasure*,” Dan continued, and then Richford and I fell to taking counsel what was to be done. I was for going straightway along the coast and landing every man jack to the sacking of Santa Marta, but Richford was of another mind, and a wiser mind than me, after all. He vowed that we had not enough men for the work, and that ’twould be best for us to go seeking Drake and Hawkins. Then, even while we were planning, Roger, a sail hove in sight, and we fell to preparing for battle, thinking it to be a Don. But it was not. It proved to be a ship from Drake’s fleet, lost in a storm and alone. Lad, it brought sad news to us!”

“Yes?” I breathed.

“It brought us the news that John Hawkins had died, and was cast into the sea that he loved so much.”

I tell you that the news did make me sob, and I lay holding Dan’s hand awhile, scarce knowing what else to do. Dan, too, was filled with emotion, for there was not a man in all England who had not loved the great sailor who had first showed the Dons that the New World was not for them alone. And now—he was dead. . . .

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“And Drake?” I asked presently.

“He, too, was sick when the ship that came to us last heard of him,” Dan told me. “The plan had been, as you know, to sack Puerto Rico, but the Dons had got wind of it, and the plan miscarried, so that the fleet put off. Then the storm came. Lad, ’twas not altogether a curse, that storm, for it brought us—here, to you!”

“How?” I asked him wonderingly.

“We told the captain of the ship what had happened, and how we proposed to go questing for Drake, though I did not forget my own old plan, and in the end, Roger, I had my way. With these newcomers we were strong—two hundred men we could put ashore, and all of them armed, together with cannon from the ships. So it was decided, and the men were willing, which they were, God bless them, that we would sail along the coast somewhat, and then landing, march us upon Santa Marta. Lad, it was like the old, old days, and for all my sick chest, I would not have been out of it for all the treasure we had got. Well, Roger, we came, just at the setting of sun. But we were discovered, and horsemen came out to meet us. We drove them back with cannon fire and then we followed them to the city walls. We breached the walls and got us way in, and I, who know not a little, as I have told you, of the ways of the Don, did plan with Richford that we make first for the church, for I had little doubt ’twas here

we'd find you. Ah, yes, Roger, I know their ways, and I know not a little of the Holy Inquisition!"

"Holy!" I exclaimed. "Unholy!"—and shuddered as I thought of what had happened to me at the hands of its servants.

"Happened it," went on Dan, after a while, "that there was a man amongst us who once had been in Santa Marta and suffered there, and he knew where the torture chamber was. Lad, we blew holes in the church, and hacked a way in, one body of us, while the rest scurried the Dons through the streets and sent them fleeing out of the gates. We got us in, I say, and made us straightway for the chamber underground. Lad, I was there—I saw that devil with his branding iron—and the arm that held it dropped as I lopped at it. I—" He paused as some one entered the room and came to my bed. I saw that it was Captain Richford.

"Dan Rodney!" he said, then stopped, as he saw that I was awake. "Roger, I'll say that I'm pleased to see you again."

"And I you, sir!" I told him. "And I'll thank you, too, sir!"

"Pshaw!" he said, as if it were a small thing he had done. "We'll be reaping a rich harvest from the venture, lad. The which I have come to tell Dan Rodney. We've scoured the city, Dan, and burst open the treasure house, which was filled to the brim. I've had the wine and the spirits poured into the gutters, lest the men get drunk and now I do think 'tis time that we made

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us back to the coast, for I have learned that there be ships lying off the cape—the ships that came with Enriquez. 'Twas he who told me so, though he wanted not to. His own rack and fire irons made him!" And Richford laughed as he spoke. "Aye, lad," he said, "I gave him a taste of his own physic, and he likes it not."

"Where is he?" I asked.

"Well held, and coming with us when we go—'twas Dan Rodney's request that we kill not him. I think Dan has a mind to take his own vengeance, eh?"

Dan nodded grimly.

"I have scores to wipe out with him," he said. "And now, about a litter for this young rascal of ours?"

"We'll swing him one between two mules," was the reply.

Although I protested that I would walk, I found that I could not, and so had to submit to being placed, in due course, in the litter between two mules, and was carried thus down to the coast—a long journey and none too comfortable a one for me, though I complained not, as you may guess! The men of the ships were happy, and sang as they marched, driving and leading the heavily laden mules, and well-nigh every man carrying something himself that he had looted from Santa Marta.

"Set him in front of me!" I said to Dan, when we started, and I saw Enriquez led out of the church and tied upon a mule. "I would fain watch him!"

Enriquez turned on me and snarled like a mad dog,

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and mouthed at his own impotence, and I do confess that during that journey I oftentimes did call out to him, taunting him, and enjoyed the futile gnashing of his teeth.

Came we at last to the coast, where I saw the two ships at anchor in a well-sheltered bay, and men on board cheered the men on land when they saw them returning so heavily laden.

“Nay, Dan,” I said eagerly, when Rodney would have sent me aboard at once. “I’d like to stay and see the loading of the barges with the treasure! Mind you that I have ne’er seen it done?”

I laughed greatly at the playfulness of it, as though I were still a schoolboy who knew naught of these things except what was told him by men from the far seas.

So I sat me on a rock and watched, and joyed in the watching. Boat after boat put off from the shore, laden to the water’s surface with fat riches from the city, and the business took several hours. The whimsical spirit that had seized me had made me make one more request of Dan, and that was that Enriquez should sit nigh me and watch too; and if ever a man looked moonstruck, it was Enriquez, as he saw the treasures from Santa Marta go aboard the ships after they had been spread out upon the shore and divided amongst the two vessels, for it had been agreed that there should be shares according to the number of men in each ship. Such a rare sight it was! Rich goblets

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of gold, studded with precious stones. Ornaments from the church; rich hangings from the houses; doubloons and pieces of eight in sackfuls—aye, it was indeed a prize worth the taking.

At last it was all done; the last piece of eight was aboard, and only Richford, Dan Rodney and Enriquez and I were left on the shore, with a boat rocking to the lap of the waves, waiting to take us on board to the *Seeker of Pleasure*.

“Dan Rodney,” said Richford suddenly, “I have a mind to lash this rogue to a rock and leave him to stare his life out across the sea! What say you?”

“He is my foe!” was Dan’s reply. “He goes aboard the *Seeker of Pleasure*, to abide my pleasure, to wait until this chest of mine, the which he did strip of its skin, shall be fit enough for me to wield sword with chance of man to man. He is mine! I fight not with filthy hands!”

“Do as you will, Dan!” said Richford. When we went to the *Seeker of Pleasure*, the now subdued and cringing Enriquez went with us, and, being thrown into irons, was cast into the hold.

“There is somewhat to wipe off on your account, Roger!” said Dan Rodney to me, when this was done.

During the journey from Santa Marta I had told him all that had happened to me, and he had gnashed his teeth with rage, so that I had thought often that he would fall upon Enriquez and flay him alive! And I should have found naught of pity for the Don. . . .

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Suffering, caused by such callous, brutal methods, does take much of the softness from a man's heart. . . .

We went down to Richford's cabin and sat us down to a great feast, while up above the men caroused, though not too unwisely, since Richford was of a mind to be off. There were with us the captain from the other vessel and his officers, and during the meal it was discussed what should be done next. Richford was for going home to Plymouth. Dan was for seeking out Drake, and so was the other captain; and as there was diversity of opinion, it was resolved that the men of the ships should vote, as was oftentimes the custom in enterprises of this sort.

Therefore, Captain Richford put it to his crew, and to a man they swore that they would go to Plymouth. Why need they stay longer? The hold was filled almost to overflowing!

Back from his own ship came the captain of our comrade, and the tale he had to tell was the same. Sick at heart over the disasters that had befallen Drake's fleet, and satisfied with their share of the plunder from Santa Marta, they, too, were for home; and so it was that, the feasting over, the two ships unfurled their sails and put to sea.

As for me, I stood on the deck watching the line of the coast disappear into a blue haze; and I could not find it in my heart to lament that I was leaving the inhospitable land, though I would have given much to have known how fared Francis Drake. Aye, I would have

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given much in that moment to have been aboard the *Defiance* with him, bound whither he would go. . . . But, I turned me round and faced the other way; beyond there was England! Home! Nay, not home, for home I had none, and I doubted me not that after a while the sea would call me again. . . . And I should answer. Now, I was going back—going with the treasure and the Cross we had come so far and suffered so much to seek. . . .

The Cross? I'faith, I had not yet seen it, and I went me hurrying to find out Dan Rodney.

I found him snoring, and waked him.

"Dan," I said, "I would see the Flaming Cross?"

"Let a man sleep—the bauble will wait!" he growled, but he got up and led me to Captain Richford's cabin. "The boy would see the Cross," he told the captain, who, laughing, went to his strong chest and opening it, delved into its depths and brought out something wrapped up in a silken covering. He laid it on the table and my fingers itched to help him as, leisurely, as though he would torment me, he unwrapped it.

"Hurry!" I exclaimed, and with a laugh, he at last whipped away the covering, and my eyes were almost blinded by the glare as the lamplight fell upon the rubies that fashioned the Flaming Cross. "Aye, a very flame indeed!" I cried; and watched in wonder the flashing of fire that came from it. "Men would die for it!"

"Men have died for it!" said Dan Rodney quietly. "And we nearly, Roger!"

CHAPTER XVI

BOUND FOR CADIZ

“**H**IDE it!” I said. “An those cutthroat heroes of ours know where ’tis they’ll likely risk death for it!”

Strange thing to say, but neither Richford nor Dan Rodney seemed to think so. The captain wrapped the Cross up again, and placed it back in the chest.

“Methinks you’re right, Roger,” he said, slowly. “Men would risk the devil’s fire for that. Thus have I had it placed here that I may guard it for—you and Dan!”

And I remembered that by compact the Flaming Cross was not ours, the which we had not told Richford.

“Nay,” I said quickly. “’Tis not ours, except in trust—in trust for the Queen’s Most Excellent Majesty, God bless her. We will guard it with our lives!”

“We will!” said the two men, and the three of us clasped hands upon it.

Little did we know what we were to be called upon to do to preserve that Flaming Cross for Queen Bess!

I draw me near to the end of my tale, and ere penning this last chapter I have reread what I have already written, wondering the while whether I have left out

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much that belongs to it. Some things there are that I have not put in, but that is because I would not over-weary any who might read the story; but they be things that I do know had naught to do with the Flaming Cross. Those events that I have lined are all of some connection with our quest; the rest matters not.

And now, as I come to scrawl the last words, I do remember that when we three, Dan Rodney, Captain Richford and I, clasped hands in compact that we would guard the Flaming Cross for Queen Bess, the most that did enter my mind was that we might have to guard it against the cupidity of our own men, or, perchance, have to fight, here and there on the way home, a Spanish ship, the which we would not be loath to do an the need arose. And, if that need did arise, we had little doubt that it would come while we were yet in the western seas, or mayhap when we got nigh unto England.

We feared not; stout were both our ships, and well manned and well armed, and we knew that our men would fight like demons, since our holds were filled with the treasure that meant ease of life an it should be gotten home.

Yet, by the providence of heaven, we were not molested while we were in the seas of the Main. We threaded our way through between the islands that lay like sentinels off the mainland, and never a ship did we see; and for nigh on two months we sped us on our way homeward without sighting sail of any kind. So that we began to grow careless, and the men lay about

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the decks in abandon, or in dreams. Soon we should see the shores of England. . . . That was enough for us. Fate was being kind to us. Naught of ill would touch us now.

And then the thunderbolt fell from the skies upon us. We raised a sail to the starboard, and then another and another and still more; and men who had been lazing idly sprang to alertness, for it was not known what manner of ships these might be. We were in the Channel itself, it is true, but that did not mean that we were safe from harm; we got us ready, lest there be need.

We held on, all eyes agog to pick out the character of the strangers, and at last the tension was broken by the cry of the watch in the barrel above.

"Ships ahoy! They be English!"

Whereat we cheered, and set course to meet them, the which we did, and dipped our flags in salutation when we came near.

Greatly wondering, we saw a boat slip from the side of one great ship, whose portholes frowned with guns, tier on tier. We watched the barge come towards the *Seeker of Pleasure*, and presently we were hailed.

"Ahoy there!" came the shout, and an officer answered the call. "What ships be you?"

Whereat our watch did tell, and ask a like question.

The answer to that set us agape, for it was nothing less than that the ships we saw were the English fleet bound for Cadiz!

"Send you your captain aboard the flagship," came

the order, and Richford could do naught but obey, while the captain of our companion vessel was also sent for, and went.

“What does it mean, Dan?” I asked Rodney, as we saw the two boats go away.

“That we’ll know in good time!” was the reply. In truth we did, for when Captain Richford, after a lengthy absence, returned, he piped all hands on deck and told them what had happened aboard the Admiral’s ship.

“The Admiral orders that we join the fleet!” he said. “He’ll be wanting all the ships he can get, and is desirous that two such well manned, well armed ships like ours shall go with him.”

“What told you him?” a voice demanded, and Richford swung round like a flash questing for the man.

“What think you!” he shot at him. “I told him that where the Queen’s Admiral called and was heard, there was but one answer: ‘We’re going!’ ”

Whereat, there was a cheer, though here and there I noticed glum faces and silent mouths. From our comrade ship came another roar, and I knew that what had happened with us had happened there also. And in a little while we had fallen in amongst the fleet, and were plowing our way towards Spain.

Two days later, we saw the line of the land to the east, and signals that I knew not the meaning of passed between the ships.

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“We attack in the morning,” said Dan to me. “God keep you, Roger!”

And then was off on some duty that was given him, and I saw him not again to speak with until, the dawn breaking, the first gun was fired, and then the cannonade became fast and furious, ships in the lee of the town that I could see in the distance, answering the firing.

Of that battle in Cadiz Harbor you may read much in your books, but there be some things that are left out. This is one such thing: it is not told that the fight that lasted all day long was not all in favor of our ships, and that towards evening it seemed as if the Dons would drive us off; it is a strange way that the writers of history have, in that they do oft conceal the unpleasant facts and pin them to the pleasant! But that I do speak is true, and there was a council held in the evening as to what should be done. The captain of every ship in the fleet was taken into that council and, why, I know not, Dan Rodney and I were amongst the men who went to the Admiral’s ship with Captain Richford.

We waited on the deck for a long time, wondering what was going to happen, and talking with men, learning from them things that had happened in England since we left, and telling them things that set their pulses throbbing, I doubt not, of what had taken place on the Main; and some of them, rugged men as they were, wept when they learned of the death of John Hawkins.

“’Tis God’s truth that never a finer man sailed the seas than he!” shouted a man, and I saw Dan Rodney

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start at the voice of him. Then Rodney had sprung at him, and was shaking his hand furiously:

“By the Lord Harry!” he cried. “If ’tis not Ben Pengowan! Old Ben—good old Ben!”

“Lord save us, it’s Dan Rodney!” said the man. “He who hid the Flaming Cross of Santa Marta. Well do I remember the tale, Dan, and—Lord save us—what’s the matter, Dan?”

I looked at Dan, and I too was amazed at what I saw on his face; it was set grimly, and his eyes shone with something that I could not understand. His hand dropped to his side, listlessly, and he padded it away from us, and we saw him approach an officer, pull his forelock, and presently begin to speak.

“Has the man gone mad?” Ben Pengowan said, and indeed I wondered whether there might not be truth in his words, more so, when presently I saw Dan follow the officer below decks. He was away a long time, and when he came back, it was in the wake of swaggering men before whom the crew fell away.

“Who are they?” I asked Pengowan, and he told me that they were the fleet captains; and I saw Richford amongst them, close to Dan Rodney.

They went overside, each to his own boat, and I followed Richford and Dan, neither saying a word to me until we reached the *Seeker of Pleasure*. When we were on deck, Richford went down to his cabin and beckoned me to follow him.

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I went—and I saw him when he entered go, with a smile on his face, to the great iron-bound chest.

“It is indeed a great thought, Dan!” he said mysteriously, and I blurted out to know what it was.

Then they told me, and I stared at them as if they had both gone mad.

I do tell you, my masters, that it was as strange a thing as ever man heard, that they told me. It was nothing less than that Dan Rodney had craved audience of the Admiral, and said that he had a plan whereby to scare the Dons and, maybe, thereby beat them.

“What is it, man?” the Admiral had asked, on being told by Captain Richford that this was one of his, a man who had gone westward with Drake, and a worthy man, too.

Thereupon, Dan had told of the recovery of the Flaming Cross of Santa Marta, and of the tale that was told about it amongst the Dons, whereupon the Admiral had said that he had heard of it before.

“But what is it to us?” he had demanded, and then Dan had told his plan.

“If the Dons believe it, sir,” he had said, “why not profit by it? The Flaming Cross is the Queen Her Most Excellent Majesty’s; that much did Admiral Drake and I agree. Let it be used for her glory. Let it be nailed to the mast, let the mast be that of the *Seeker of Pleasure*!—and with lights about it! And so let the *Seeker of Pleasure* lead the fleet into the harbor again!”

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Thereat there had been much discussion, and at last it was resolved that the seemingly mad scheme should be tried.

And standing watching Richford unwrap the Cross again, I found myself wondering if this talisman would work!

The flashing fire from the Cross dazzled us, and I said that 'twas best that it should be carried up on deck covered.

"Let me nail it to the mast!" I cried, but they would have none of that.

It needed more skilled hands and feet than mine to do that work, and so, another man took the precious Cross and clambered aloft with it, while others went after him with lanterns, and within half an hour there was glowing, like a vivid living flame at our mast-head—the Cross of Santa Marta.

The thought came to me as I looked up at the Flaming Cross that it would be a good thing to let Enriquez loose from the hold and show him the glowing glory aloft, the which I did tell Dan Rodney. His eyes gleamed as he heard me, and he went stamping down the hatchway and came back presently dragging the prisoner. He looked far different from the swaggerer of Santa Marta, yet there was still the light of bitterness and hatred—aye, and somewhat of courage, in his eye as he faced us.

"What would ye?" he demanded, looking about him, and I would swear that even in that gloom of the eve-

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ning, he did recognize Cadiz in the distance. Yet if he did, he kept it to himself, and I stepping forward, pointed a finger towards the masthead.

“Look you!” I cried, and his eyes followed the direction of my hand. Then his manacled hands went to his face and he cowered away as in terror.

“The Cross! The Flaming Cross!” he cried.

I knew that he realized the significance of it. Aye, and he hugged the mast, keeping his eyes covered. In such a manner did he stand as the *Seeker of Pleasure* moved in toward shore.

CHAPTER XVII

VICTORY

IT seemed that news had gone through the fleet of what was afoot, and when the Cross flamed forth there was a great uproar of cheering from every ship, and immediately afterwards the guns began again, and the ships were bearing down upon the harbor of Cadiz.

The flashes of gunfire, and the booming of the guns made the night hideous; the Dons were not caught napping, and they gave us much to think about, but it was as if that Cross at the masthead of the *Seeker of Pleasure* had inspired our men to deeds of unheard valor, for the ships drove in before a terrific fire, and threw themselves amongst the Dons. The *Seeker of Pleasure* was in first, and laid herself alongside a monster of a vessel, from the deck of which there suddenly went up cries of dismay—not merely the cries that one might rightly expect in such circumstances of battle, but cries of sheer terror; and Dan Rodney, who knew much of Spanish, shouted with the joy of what he heard.

“ ’Tis the Cross!” he said. “They know it and ’tis good for us! Out boarders!”

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The grapnel irons were flung out, and seized upon the woodwork of the Don; and then the boarders were over, I amongst them. Of that fight I mind me little, so fast was it. Yet it was only fast because we had but little resistance; it was as if terror had seized the Dons, for they scurried away from before us like rats before a scalding stream, and presently we had them battened down, those of them who had not leaped overboard.

I leaned me against the ship's side and wiped my sword and, as I did so, Dan Rodney stumbled against me.

"Dan!" I cried. "You're wounded."

"Aye, wounded, but happy!" was his laughing reply. "Lad, the day's won. See——" and he pointed to here and to there, where ships were lying silent as regards their firing, and to others which were scurrying out to sea. "The Dons are beaten, Roger; the Flaming Cross has beaten them!"

As he spoke, there were two great explosions, and the night was turned into day; two ships had blown up, and in the glare we could see other evidences of the havoc that had been wrought upon the Dons, while on the shore were buildings in flames. I looked aloft and saw the Flaming Cross still shining upon the *Seeker of Pleasure*.

"Dan," I said quietly, "'twould be a sorry thing if a shot carried away the Cross!"

"Nay, we'll live to carry it to the Queen herself!" he

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told me laughingly. "Look, there is the signal for recall!"

We scrambled back onto the *Seeker of Pleasure*, leaving a prize crew aboard to get our captive away after us, the which was done, and the first sight we saw was Enriquez, lying on the deck. I bent over him, and Dan with me, peered into his face. I straightened myself up and laid a hand upon the shoulder of Rodney.

"Come, Dan," I said. "Death has cheated you of your vengeance. The man is dead!"

"Well for me," said Rodney. "Mayhap my anger would have taken some of the manliness from me and made me do those things of which I would have been ashamed. I mind me not a fair fight with a man, but with tricksters and traitors I scarce know how to deal, and still think well of Dan Rodney!"

"There be other men who think well of Dan Rodney," I told him simply. He took me by the hand, and together we went down into the great cabin, where we found Captain Richford binding up a wounded arm with the aid of teeth and the fingers of an arm that had not been wounded.

"'Tis over," he said. "By the Queen's ruffle, I do believe that the Flaming Cross it was that did it." Whereat we laughed and quaffed us a bumper of good wine in thanksgiving!

We stood outside the harbor, our prize alongside us; and men were busy clearing away the grim signs of the night's work—signs that looked terrible in the early

morning light. Long since, we had taken down the Flaming Cross, and once more it was in the chest in Richford's cabin, and Dan and I imagined that it would lie there until we got us back to Plymouth. It was not so, however, for presently we saw a boat coming towards us, and that it had left the Admiral's ship.

We watched it, Dan and I, and soon Richford himself came and stood beside us.

"By the Lord Harry!" he exclaimed, presently. "It is the Admiral himself and——"

"He's coming hither!" I cried.

In truth I was right, for the barge drew alongside and a ladder was outflung, up which clambered a jovial-faced sailorman, in splendid raiment.

"Ho, there!" he cried. "Captain Richford—aye, and Dan Rodney, I'd have word with you in private!"

"It is an honor, sir, to us and our ship," said Richford, bowing, and he led the way below. Presently a messenger came running upon deck and told me that the captain did want me, whereat I went me down, knocked on the cabin door and, at command, entered. To stand at the door and stare, for the Admiral was holding the Flaming Cross in his hand, moving this way and that, as if to catch to the beauty of it.

"Come in, Roger!" said Richford, and I stepped right in, closing the door behind me. "Sir," the captain said to the Admiral, "this is Roger Hampsley, of whom we have spoken."

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The Admiral put down the Cross and held out his hand to me.

“Master Hampsley,” he said, “I am pleased to shake hands with you. But for what you and your friends here have done in bringing this Cross from the Main, I think me we’d not have had such an easy task last night. I know the tale of that Cross, and in truth it seems right—aye, and we’ll make the tale right, shall we? We’ve proved to the Dons that they own not the seas; now we’ll show them that the ownership shall go elsewhere. We’ll use the tale of the Flaming Cross against them!”

I tell you that I felt the blood coursing through me at his words, and I could but stammer words that must have been incoherent.

Then, before I could recover myself, the Admiral had gone. . . . And presently the fleet was setting sail from the coast, battered and torn, but triumphant.

What more shall I tell?

Little, since there be not much to tell about the Flaming Cross, though I’ll have you know that there be many things that I might tell of adventures on the seas thereafter. For me now, however, my purpose is to tell of how Dan Rodney and I, together with Captain Richford, did go to London to see the Queen, carrying with us the Flaming Cross.

The fleet had put into port and the *Seeker of Pleasure* had discharged her rich cargo, the sharing being done,

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and the men going whither they would to spend their treasure. We had left the ship in the hands of the shipwrights, for she sorely needed patching; and then, one day, we took coach for London, rejoicing in the sight of green fields.

Came the day when we arrived in London, and had I time I would tell of what I felt at my first sight of the city. But time I have not now. We made us our way to Whitehall, bedecked in gay raiment, bought for the occasion, and I do mind me that I felt as the equal of any slashing youngster that I met, what with my new sword and jerkin and hose, and the shoes that had them silver buckles.

“A young blood in truth!” Dan Rodney had laughed at me, but I cared not for his humor.

We reached the Palace and, Lord save us, we did demand audience of the Queen herself, as though we were noblemen!

We had somewhat of trouble, but what cared we? Dan Rodney drew his sword and well-nigh ran through a grinning jackanapes who would have barred our way; and thereafter, things did change, so much that as we went into the Palace, with swords drawn, folk rushed to do our bidding, and there came a moment when a man in gold coat and with a red face, as though he had just had it smacked—I did learn afterwards that that was the truth, Her Majesty doing the slapping when he did counsel her to have us thrown out!—this

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man who looked like a canary, came, I say, and bowed to us, and bade us follow him.

The which we did; and presently, we stood face to face with the Queen Her Most Excellent Majesty.

I with the Flaming Cross tucked under my arm, since Dan had said that I should do the giving.

We dropped to our knees, having seen the canary man do so, and in such posture did hear the Queen say:

“I have heard of you—’twas the Admiral who told me. Get you to your feet and let me see what bauble ’tis you bring!”

Bauble, indeed!

I was angered, and I showed it in my face, I think, for the Queen laughed.

“Nay, Master Hampsley—see, I know your name,” she said. “Take not our joking thus. Let’s see thy gift!”

Which, an you will admit, was better; and I, with trembling fingers, unwrapped the Cross and held it out to a woman who gasped, went pale, then flushed and who seized the thing in her hands.

Not a word did she say for a while, and we three feasted our eyes upon her joy as she played with the pretty thing. Then she looked at us.

“My friends,” she said, and I glowed with the pride of that, “’tis a very beautiful thing. No bauble this. It shall hang——”

“Not where it can be seen, your Most Excellent Majesty!” said Dan Rodney, fearlessly. “There be

THE FLAMING CROSS OF SANTA MARTA

men who would give their lives if they might get that thing to Spain. We've fought for it, aye, and men have died for it, that it should come hither to you; see you that it be hidden!"

And then, what would you? The Queen did make Dan Rodney tell the tale of the Flaming Cross, though I fear me he did leave out not a little of the story; and when he had finished, there were tears upon the cheeks of the Queen of England.

She stooped down from the chair on which she sat and took us each by the hand.

"My friends," she said again, "I thank you. I will see you on another day, for I do see that you be gallant men—men such as I would have in my service!"

And so she dismissed us, we as proud as peacocks in a king's garden; and so, my masters, ends the tale of the Flaming Cross of Santa Marta. Nay, not ends, perhaps, although the Cross itself was broken up, lest its existence bring peril to the Queen. But its true story went on, and I, who not long after that first sight of my Queen, did enter her service, and who now am known as Sir Roger Hampsley—the why of that belongs to another story—do know that the tale of the Flaming Cross has gone on, for Spain is no longer what she was, and England, whom once she despised, now rides in splendor and in might upon the seas.

Strange, you say? Strange that the Flaming Cross should bring that about? Well, mayhap. But not only was it the Flaming Cross—maybe it had little enough

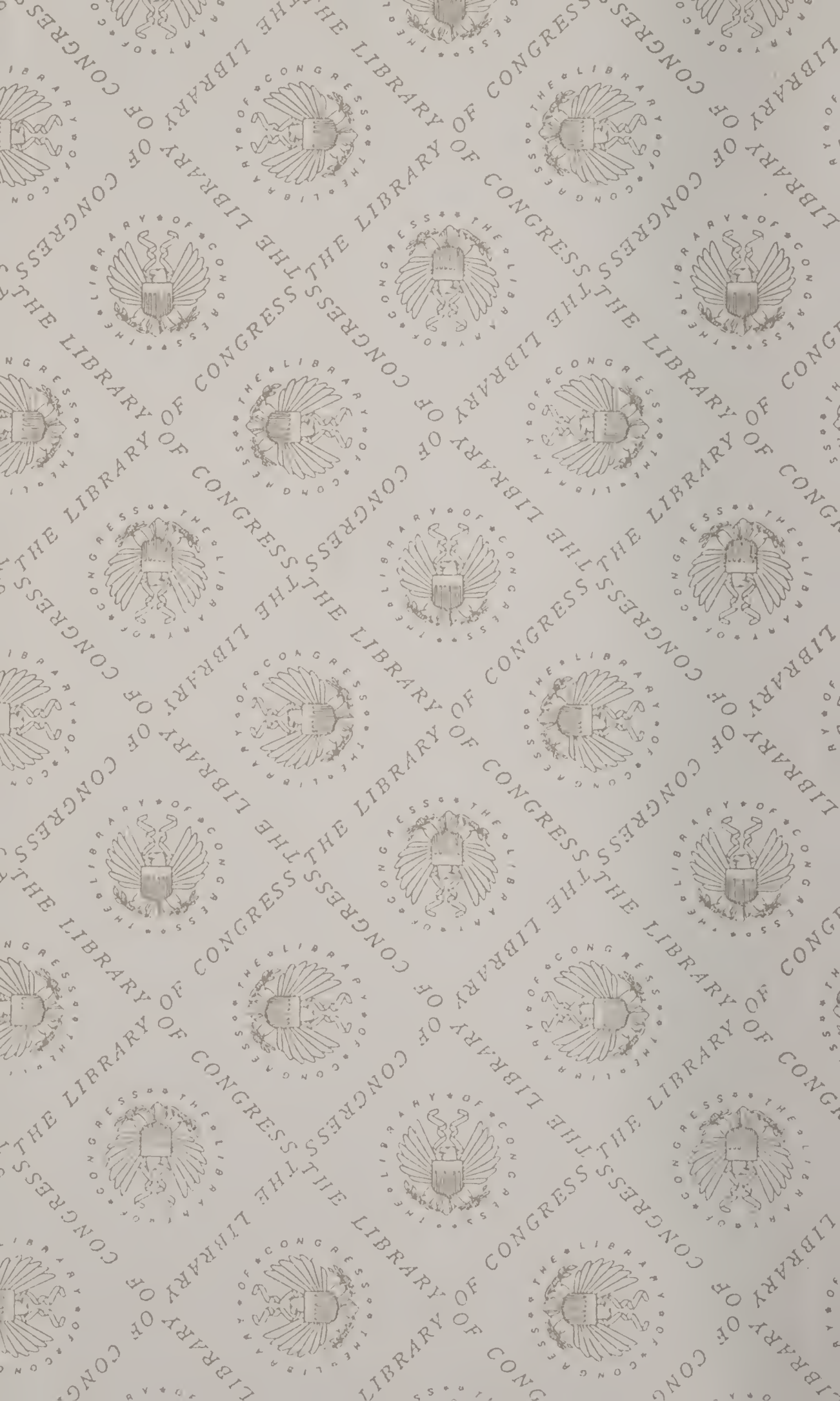
VICTORY

to do with it, in truth. But this much is certain, that the spirit of the men of England—of men like Hawkins, who died as I have told—of Drake, who, too, as we heard when we had been not long home, died and was given a sailor's burial, his great expedition unfinished; aye, of men like Dan Rodney—God rest him—he died not more than three years ago, in this very library where now I sit; such men as these were they who broke the power of Spain—aye, and would have broken it, even had there been no Flaming Cross of Santa Marta, or, being one, had it never left the church in that city on the Main.

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THE END

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